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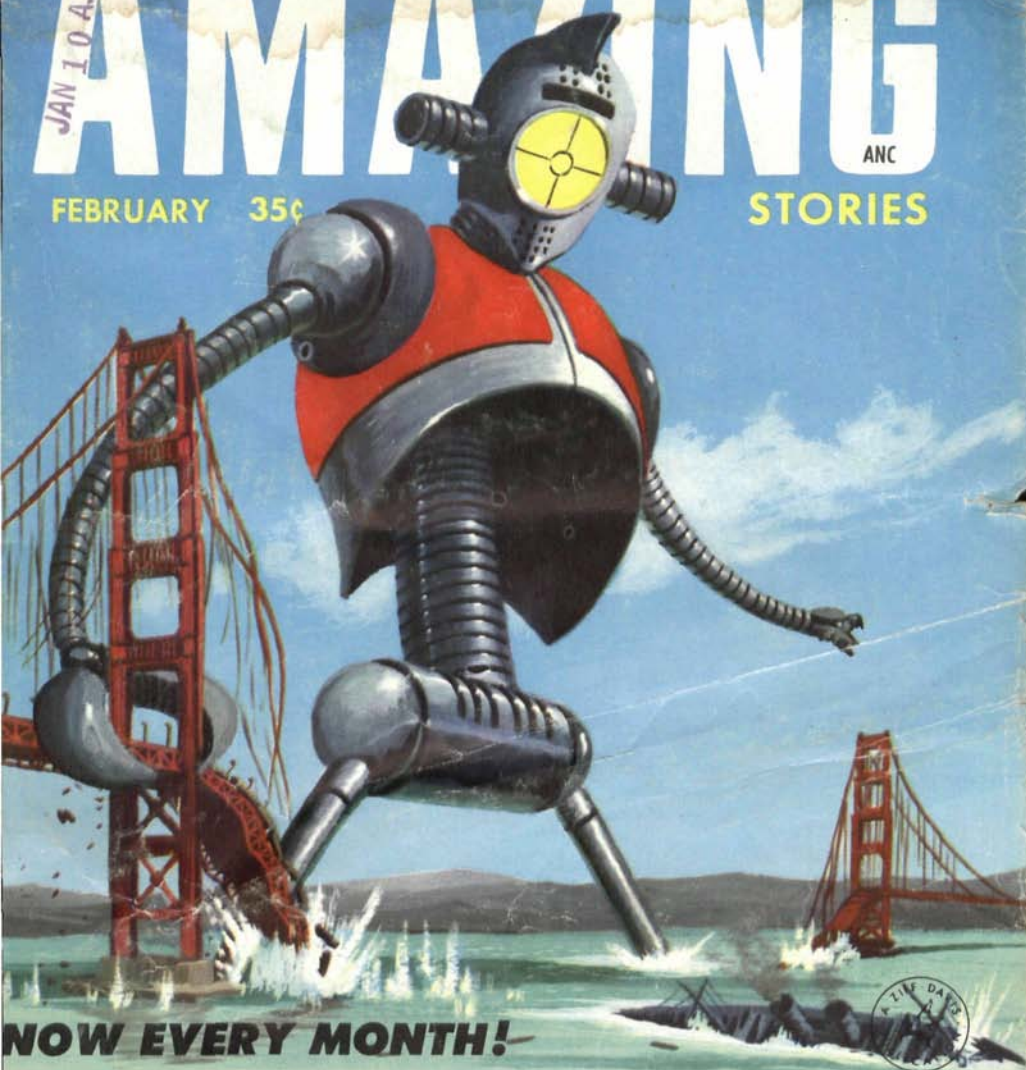
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STORIES



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CALL HIM COLOSSUS by Malcolm Meade

Why Had This Metal Man Become a Ravaging Monster?

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IN THE APRIL 1956 ISSUE

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At last the news you've been waiting for! The **BIG! BIG!** 30th Anniversary issue of **AMAZING STORIES** will trace the growth of science-fiction through a full three decades. 260 pages of the truly classic stories of the past thirty years, taken from the pages of the world's **FIRST** science-fiction magazine. Not one of these stories has appeared anywhere since its first presentation. The greatest names in the field will march once more across the pages of **AMAZING STORIES**. On sale March 8th, 1956.



**260
pages**



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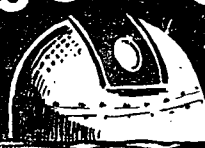


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the observatory

by The Editor



● Headline in *New York Times*, November 22, 1956:

MOON IS ON SALE, ONLY \$1 AN ACRE

(It is a crisp November day. Mr. Gooch, a small, middle-aged man in a pin-stripe business suit and a dark Homburg, enters the offices of Moonbeams Estates, Inc. and looks about nervously. He is approached by an affably smiling salesman.)

"Ah, good morning, sir. Beautiful day—on Earth. What can we do for you?"

"Well, uh—I seen your ad in the paper and I thought maybe, uh—"

"Certainly, sir. The moment you came in that door I knew you were a man of vision. Now if you'll just step over here to this telescope I'll be glad to point out a few of our choicest properties. . . ."

"Well, uh—I'd kinda like to know something about the, uh, the place before I, uh, I—"

"Happy to answer any questions. Any questions at all, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Gooch. Phineas Q. Gooch. The little woman and me was kinda thinking of picking up a few acres and building a place. We been talking about moving to the suburbs and we thought maybe this—"

"Couldn't make a wiser choice, Mr. Gooch. Just the spot, for instance, for sports. On the moon you get winter and summer sports, both right in your own backyard and both within twenty-eight days. On the moon, you get summer every fourteen days and winter every fourteen nights. Couldn't ask for anything handier, could you?"

"Sounds real good. But I was thinking about fishing. I'm

(Concluded on page 130)

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Here is YOUR chance to cash in on your hobby and your imagination! As a reader of **AMAZING STORIES** you have a much better than average idea of what the status of Man and his Universe will be in the year 2001 A.D. Will we have reached the stars? Will a five-hour work *week* be standard? What new wonders will the world of medicine have accomplished? These are only illustrations, of course; this is YOUR contest all the way!

Here's all you do: Send us, in five hundred words or less, what YOU think the world of 2001 will have in store for us. Entries will be judged on the basis of originality, clarity of expression and neatness of presentation.

But you must act **FAST!** All entries must be postmarked not later than 12:00 midnight, February 1, 1956. So why delay? Send your entry right now—**TODAY!** Mail it to: Contest Editor, *Amazing Stories*, 366 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Contest is open to everybody except employees of Ziff-Davis Publishing Company and their families. All entries become the property of Ziff-Davis Publishing Company and none will be returned. Judges are to be the editors of *Amazing Stories*. Decision of the judges is final, and in case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded.

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CALL HIM COLOSSUS

By MALCOLM MEADE

One lone man stood between the world and its own destruction. He could buy the salvation of mankind. And the price? Something very dear to any man. His life.

FORWARD

The opening of this story is pure fiction. That's why I'm setting it down in a Forward—in order to separate it from the rest. The reason for this fictitious opening is that I don't know when or where the story actually started.

Then how can I write it? A good question, friend. The fact is, I can't write it. At least not all of it because—as I said—I don't know the beginning. And maybe not even the end. After I tell what I have to tell, the word FINIS I put in caps at the end of my copy could very easily be the beginning. I have no way of know-





The robot advanced and the fate of mankind hung in the balance.

ing. Neither will you. Nor will anybody except God and certain persons who aren't talking.

So I'm setting down a purely fictional opening—the way I hope it started. And make special note of that word hope. Because friend, hope is about all you and I and the rest of us have left.

You don't understand? I don't blame you. I wouldn't either if I were you sitting there reading what I've written. But you will. You'll understand and then maybe you won't sleep tonight. Confidentially, I haven't slept for many a night. And there are others. Again confidentially, we want you in our boat. We don't want to be the only ones who can't sleep. So read on. Read my fictitious opening twice; get it set in your mind. I'll put a big black line at the end of it so you'll know where fiction ends and fact begins.

Then go on with the story ...

*

IT BEGAN in a strange looking ship hanging in space over the planet Earth. This ship and others of its type had been seen quite often by the Earthians—I hate the word Terrans—but none had ever

been overtaken, engaged in combat, or even photographed very clearly.

In the control room of this ship there was a Commander and a Second in Command and the Second was making a report to the Commander. This report was not a spur-of-the-moment thing. It was the result of long and careful study.

The Second said—in heaven knows what kind of alien gibberish—"The results of the analysis are negative."

The Commander reacted with disgust. He growled the equivalent of—"Oh, for Pete's sake!"

"I'm sorry."

"But we've spent years."

"An investigation of this type takes years."

"I suppose so. What are the negative components?"

"Distance and climatic conditions."

"Too far away, huh?"

"Yes. In case of resistance—and there would be a great deal—our supply lines would be too long, too thin. Their aircraft is close to the theoretical point of being able to cripple our ships. Taking into consideration the number of worlds in the galaxies within our range, the risk is not worth it."

"What about the climate?"

"Temperature changes are

such that we would require artificial protection at all times."

"Those damn helmets."

"We would need complete coverage. On the desirable parts of this planet the temperature can range over forty degrees in twenty-four of their hours."

"Good lord! That would be fatal!"

"Also it ranges over one hundred degrees in one solar revolution."

The Commander shuddered. "How do they exist? An Earthian must have the sensibilities of a rock pile."

"They are extremely hardy and resourceful."

The Commander waxed thoughtful. "That brings up another possibility."

"Another?"

"They might lick the everlasting pants off us."

"The thought has occurred to me."

"All right. Give orders for complete evacuation."

"There is one more thing."

"What is it?"

"We have stayed too long. We are too heavy for our remaining fuel supply."

"Then dump something overboard."

"What shall we dump?"

"The heaviest unit possible, naturally. What is the heaviest

item on the equipment list?"

"A B-6-2-R mobile destruction unit."

"Will dropping one give us the necessary lift?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then dump it and let's get out of here. Every ship in the area." The Commander scowled and shuddered again. "A hundred degree range. Good lord!"

So the unit was dropped and the fleet left the System—never to return. . . .

And now we're done with fiction. Let's get to fact. . . .

We buried him near the place he was born, a sleepy little upstate-New York town. The cemetery was a couple of miles out and Peg and I hired a local yokel to drive us in a battered old Ford. Peg was crying and I didn't feel too chipper myself.

This local bump at the wheel was the talkative type and halfway out he twisted his head around and said, "I don't get it—all this fuss in burying old man Holloway. Old Crazy, we used to call him. Harmless as a bunny rabbit, but—Gosh, all those flowers! Holloway was just plain nuts." Peg stopped crying. She is a very beautiful girl; a deceptively

demure looking girl. She wadded her handkerchief into a ball and spoke quietly and pleasantly.

"You—in the front seat."

The yokel turned so only a corner of one eye was on the road. "Me, ma'am?"

"Yes. How would you like to have me take the heel of my shoe and knock every one of your rotten teeth down your rotten throat?"

He gulped. "Why, lady—I—"

"Then be a good little cretin and remain very quiet."

"But ma'am—I—"

"In plain English—shut your damn mouth!"

The yokel turned back to his driving; Peg went back to her soft crying; I went back to my thoughts.

There wasn't much fuss, really. Not very many people at the funeral of John Hamilton Holloway. But with reason. Not too many people knew what he had done. And many of those who knew were necessarily occupied elsewhere because a hell of a lot was going on elsewhere. There were the tons of metal to be cut up and carted away; the dead and the injured to be found and cared for; the hysterical to be quieted; the vast job of reconstruction to be started.

But the President and the Governor and dozens of other bigwigs sent wires of condolence and flowers. The President said he felt the funeral should have been at Arlington but he respected John Holloway's wish to lie among his own.

So Holloway wasn't forgotten by any means.

The press had the biggest representation. Every wire service was represented and most of the big dailies sent special correspondents. And a lot of these brethren of the fourth estate with red faces, too. Those who had laughed at him and sneered at him down in Washington; who had called him a crackpot and pushed him aside while they ran around getting learned statements from public figures ridiculing John Holloway.

That was the pattern. Ask some big name—in mock seriousness—what he thought of John Holloway's assertions. Then print the tongue-in-cheek answer. Always good for a yak.

Many of them were here now, but humbled and chastened and ready to write sincerely.

Peg and I could have named our own representees and our own figures. Every big mag-

azine and paper in the country wanted our copy and would have paid through the nose. But we turned them all down and came only as reporters for the New York *Advance*. And we weren't pinning any medals on ourselves for refusing the exploitation; either. We would have been—as Peg put it—pigs to do otherwise.

Our value lay not in our towering abilities but in the fact that we were there first. We had believed in Holloway and had brought out his story. Peg and the *Advance* and I. The *Advance* after being almost laughed off the street had risen now to towering prestige, but Colonel Bane wasn't taking advantage of it either. No we-told-you-so editorials. No chortling. Only a prayer of thanksgiving under the masthead and the front page bordered in black where the final chapter of the Holloway story was told. The Colonel even refused to score a beat. We took our copy off the wires right along with everybody else.

The funeral procession was pulled down to a crawl by the roughness of the road and I had plenty of time to think. To remember where I first met him.

How—so far as I was concerned—it started.

When I came into the City Room one afternoon and heard Peg Thorsen say, "Damn!" as I walked past her desk. I stopped. I'd have probably stopped anyway. I'd been trying to break down Peg's defenses for a long time and had got nowhere. But I was optimistic.

I said, "Come, come. Curses lead to violence and then where are we?"

She turned her pretty face in my direction leaving me to regret only that her pretty legs were hidden by the desk. She was our sob sister and one of the best in the business—a worthy career but I felt she should be home—in my home, raising my kids; both home and kids at the moment being theoretical.

She said, "Who ever heard of John Holloway? Did you?"

"Not me. How about us knocking off for a drink? A lot of drinks. Then you might get potted to the point where I could—"

"Don't tell me. I know what you have in your obscene mind."

"I resent that. You know I'm a gentleman. I'd ask first."

"Hoping I'd be in no condition to answer. Look, love—how about covering this assignment for me?"

"What assignment?"

"John Hamilton Holloway. Why Pete always throws these things my way—" Her annoyance made her face look bright and sexy. Or maybe she was right. Maybe I had a low mind.

I said, "We shall compromise. We'll go together. Then afterwards—"

"Afterwards it gives a thick steak with no strings attached, you paying for same. Come on. Let's get it over with."

We rode across town and down into the garment district. As we got out I said, "What's this guy done—invented a new kind of brassiere?"

"I don't know," Peg said. "But maybe I can snatch a few pairs of nylons out of this if I promise to write pretty for him."

We went up a long stairway and came to a door at the end of a hall marked "*School of Mental Telepathy*. And down in the corner *John Hamilton Holloway*. The hall was dirty. The door and the frosted glass panel were sparkling clean. There was a green rubber mat on the dirty floor that read *Welcome*. You could tell it was scrubbed regularly.

We went inside and found a small clean door with perhaps

two dozen chairs facing a raised platform. Five of the chairs were occupied by four serious-faced young men and an equally serious-faced young woman.

And the goings-on were weird indeed. Weird in that nothing was going on, and if that sounds like a cockeyed contradiction, reserve judgment until you read on.

There was a little gray-haired man sitting on a chair on the platform—not doing anything—just sitting there with his hands folded in his lap. The five young people also sat doing nothing. Except that at intervals one of them would get up without apparent bidding and perform real crazy.

They evidently didn't see us, or if they did no one paid any attention, and while we stood and gaped, one of the young men got up from his chair. He stepped into the aisle, buttoned his jacket tight, got down on his toes and fingers, and did five pushups. This accomplished, he stood up and went back to his chair, evidently quite proud of himself.

Immediately a second young man went into action. His wingding was shared by the young lady. He stood up, bowed in courtly fashion and extended his hand. She took

it gravely and he led her into the aisle where they began solemnly waltzing to imaginary music. The other students looked on with grave approval.

Peg looked at me. Her eyes asked, *What gives here? Shall we call the squirrel catchers?*

I replied by drawing a circle in the air and then squeezing its sides in and top and bottom together with my palms to indicate I considered us to be in the presence of real squares.

The dance finished, everyone sat quiet for a moment. Then they got up and walked to the hat-rack, took their hats and filed out past us. All except the girl. She wasn't wearing a hat and went first. And one of the young men. He just sat and looked uncomfortable. Until the man on the platform said, "Didn't you get the message, Robert?"

"No. I'm sorry."

"I told you class was dismissed."

"Oh." He got up and scurried out. He evidently hadn't heard the prof the first time. Which put him at our level. Because we hadn't either.

As I said—weird.

After the last student left, the man on the platform stepped down and came toward us. "You are from the

Advance," he stated pleasantly. Not a question—an assertion.

He had arresting blue eyes and there was something about him I got instantly but couldn't define. Not then or later. I knew him for three monumental weeks and after that I looked at him in his coffin and still couldn't define it. But it was there. A sort of supreme confidence in himself and his own ability; this mixed with an almost child-like simplicity that made you know that here was a man without guile; a man who would not know how to go about deceiving you; would never try.

Of course there's a lot of second guessing in that description but it *did* hit me—right from the first.

I think it hit Peg too.

I said, "I'm Lee Ramsey. This is Peg Thorsen, my colleague. You phoned?"

He had a round, childish, healthy face that went with the simplicity and when he smiled it seemed to brighten his halo of white hair. "I'm honored that you came," he said. "But now that you're here I don't quite know how to begin."

"Maybe you could start," Peg said, "by explaining the

peculiar goings-on we just witnessed."

"I'll be delighted. Won't you sit down?" We took two chairs and he turned one around so he sat facing us. "This," he said, "as you no doubt concluded, is a school of mental telepathy."

"It says so on the door, but that doesn't tell us much," I said.

Peg pulled no punches. "Mr. Holloway—you are Mr. Holloway, aren't you?" He nodded. She went on. "In our business we meet many strange people. We find most of these people have one ambition in common—to do their fellow man out of his valuables. Their methods are many and devious. I mention that only in passing with no offense intended."

"Thank you."

"And now perhaps you would care to tell us about your racket."

"It consists of teaching the science of mental telepathy."

"The people who just left were your students?"

"Yes."

"But you have more than five."

"No. Adaptability is hard to find."

"What do you charge for your course?"

"Nothing. It is free. In fact

I am advancing funds to three of my students. They could not continue with the work otherwise."

"Then where does your revenue come from?"

"I make a little money writing articles for magazines dealing with my subject."

"You can't make much that way."

"I don't, but I supplement my income by washing dishes at night. I'd be glad to give you the name of the restaurant where I am employed."

Peg pursed her lips. "This deal's a real cutie. Now—"

I felt a surge of annoyance.

"Peg—why don't you just let the Professor—"

"I must correct you. I am not a professor. I hold no degrees of any description. I am a layman in every respect."

"—why don't you let Mr. Holloway tell his story in his own way?"

Peg glanced at me with some surprise; well-founded surprise because normally I would have been way ahead of her in the frank question department. I've been known to scintillate as a hurler of the sarcastic query. So she could well wonder what was wrong with me.

I didn't know myself. There was just something about this man that gave me pause. A

quick warning from somewhere inside me: *It costs nothing to be civil. Don't say anything you might be sorry for later. You might regret a wisecrack at this point.*

My outburst threw Peg off balance long enough for me to say, "Let's have it, Mr. Holloway—the how-when-where-why of whatever it is you wish to give us. We won't promise to print anything but we'll listen."

Peg sat back, rather nonplussed. "Yes, I guess—we will," she murmured.

"Thank you," Holloway said quietly. "To make you understand I'll have to go quite far back."

"Go as far as you like."

"You, of course, know what mental telepathy is—the ability to send and receive unspoken thoughts from another mind. This talent is not found in many. Something called extrasensory perception is necessary. Several colleges have made investigations into this mental condition."

"Duke University pioneered in it, I believe," Peg said.

"Yes. And there have been others." Holloway leaned back and regarded the ceiling. "When you entered, we were in the midst of some exercises."

"How does it work?" I asked.

"The students make themselves as receptive as possible. I send commands from the platform to one individual at a time. That individual is required to interpret the command from a delivered mental impulse and obey it."

"Hmm," Peg said. "Some of them seem pretty good at it, I must say."

"They are fine, eager students," Holloway replied; "but perhaps a demonstration would be more to the point. It might prove entertaining to you."

I leaned forward, more interested than I cared to admit even to myself. "Fire away."

"Very well. I ask that you close your eyes and let your mind wander over your past history—as far back as you can remember. I will attempt to interpret your thoughts as they enter my mind."

"Fair enough." I leaned back and closed my eyes.

Holloway, looking over the spotless room as though he thought it needed cleaning said, "You had a fight with a boy named Kenny when you were eight. You lived with your Aunt Martha after your father died of heart disease when you were six. Aunt Martha was very good to you and

she made fine molasses cookies. There was a place under a tree in the backyard where you went to talk to your mother when things went bad. Your mother died when you were born but she came and talked to you. She wore a white gown and had long golden hair and was very beautiful. Aunt Martha mortgaged her home to put you through college. You never found that out until after you graduated from Wilson University, a small Illinois college. You roomed with another student named Sam Deegan. You experienced a strong attraction toward a teacher named Barbara Hastings and one evening you—"

I raised a quick hand. "Sure—sure, I believe you. Your esp is plenty sharp. What's next?"

Holloway looked at Peg. He wore a slight smile. She threw up a protective hand. "Oh, no you don't! You stay out of my mind!"

I looked at Peg and a thought drifted by that I fervently hoped Holloway hadn't caught. If he did he gave no indication. He leaned back again and looked thoughtfully into space. "I didn't ask you here to parade phenomena," he said. "What I have to tell you is far more serious but

I'll have to lay a little more groundwork."

"Go ahead," I said.

"I became aware of my peculiar talent at a rather early age and was considered somewhat of a freak in the place I lived—a small upstate town here in New York. I'm afraid during those early years I spent more time amusing myself than on anything else. Then strange things began to happen."

Holloway's mild face sobered. "I began intercepting thought processes that confused me until I realized they did not originate any place on this planet."

Not wishing to appear completely stupid, I'd been waiting for a spot to interpose an erudite question—a real whizzer that would set him back on his heels. I thought I'd found it. "How was it possible to know they didn't originate here? This is a big planet."

But he had his answer ready. "It is impossible for anyone to project a thought save in a language of some sort. Thus language is necessary in both vocal and mental contact. A thought, Mr. Ramsey, goes through your mind in the form of an unspoken sentence; or at least in the form of disjointed words. Your mental symbol of any

object is the same as your spoken symbol. That is the reason no esp can intercept and interpret the thought of an animal—a dog for instance. A dog obviously has thought patterns but its symbols are beyond interpretation—at least beyond my ability to interpret.”

“I see what you mean,” Peg said, and I was struck by her complete change of attitude. Her cynicism was gone. “If you listened in mentally on a native Japanese for instance and weren’t familiar with the language you would have no idea what he was thinking about.”

“Correct except for one point. The implication *listening in* isn’t quite accurate when you imply it is snooping. The human brain, Miss Thorsen, is a far more powerful instrument than anyone realizes. It works with and directs electronic frequencies so fine and so powerful no instrument has ever been devised to record them. The higher ones that is—the thought emanations. Visualize, if you will, all the radio stations in the world broadcasting at once; the maze of radio waves undulating through space, free to anyone with an instrument capable of reinterpreting them into words.

“Now visualize every living being on the planet sending thought waves out into the surrounding atmosphere. Visualize the resulting patterns of streaming electrons—so infinitely fine they can be picked up only by a like instrument—another brain.”

While we rather mudily pondered this, Holloway said, “The thought in your mind at this moment, Miss Thorsen, encircles the earth before its drive is diffused.”

I said, “Then a man in your position—capable of picking these waves up must be driven almost insane from the mental racket.”

“If he could not tune in and out at will.”

“How would that be possible? A huge jumble of thought waves kiting back and forth—”

“Mr. Ramsey, no two brains ever emanate—or, shall we say, broadcast?—on the same wave-length.”

“You mean every living brain has a different wave-length?”

“Exactly.”

“It’s impossible.”

“Not at all. The wave-length of every human voice, of every audible animal is also unique to that human or that beast.”

“There just wouldn’t be

enough wave-lengths to go around."

"The same was said of fingerprints when the theory of their individuality was advanced. Yet no two prints are alike nor will two ever be alike among those yet to be born."

"Then you were sure, Mr. Holloway, that the thoughts you heard did not originate on this planet?" Peg spoke breathlessly. She stared at Holloway with rapt attention.

"Proving it took quite a while. There are many languages spoken on earth and from the proving I became a fairly accomplished linguist, but that is not important."

"What is important, Mr. Holloway?"

"That extraterrestrials — beings from another world — were circling our planet, investigating it, possibly engaging in exhaustive surveys."

"But not understanding their thoughts, you could not be sure as to exactly what they were up to?"

"Correct. I've known of their presence in and around our atmosphere for many years. When I first became aware of them I was frightened. Then, as time went on and nothing happened, my fears were lulled." He smiled swiftly. "I learned to live with them you might say."

"But something has happened to cause you new concern?"

"Yes. They have left our planetary premises. Departed completely. They have evidently gone home."

"And that's bad?"

"Not in itself, but they left something behind them."

"What?"

"I don't know."

I said, "Now look here, Mr. Holloway. I've tried to be more than open-minded on this thing because—well, I don't quite know why myself, but—"

He held up his hand and appeared to wince. I knew instantly our thoughts were hurting a sensitive spot in his mind. "Please. I'm well aware of your natural reactions to my last statements, but let me try to explain." We waited while he groped for words. He said, "From this point I must risk sounding even more melodramatic but it can't be helped. After the aliens left, there was about twenty-four hours of silence from that strata of air atmosphere. Then I began catching a new emanation. A new terrible emanation, Mr. Ramsey, a mentality giving forth a thought structure completely venomous and hostile, yet pos-

sessing no word structure upon which to formulate it."

"But you said," Peg reminded him, "that thoughts without basis of a language could not be received by an esp."

Holloway's face seemed suddenly weary and drawn. "True, and this is the only exception I have ever encountered, so there is only one logical answer. This thing that was left behind is not human—nor is it animal. It is an artificially constructed entity of some sort into which these people have built—through their advanced science—a robot mentality attuned to pure viciousness."

Up to this point he had done us the courtesy of letting us ask our own questions. Now his intensity became such that he could no longer wait for us to speak. Instead, he began picking them out of our minds. He looked at Peg and said, "I have no idea what this devilish entity consists of other than a vicious mental structure—nor what form even that is encased in. I only know it must be destroyed because the emanations grow stronger each day and peril of some kind is involved."

He turned to me. "In the ocean, Mr. Ramsey. It lies, I am sure, somewhere off the

Jersey coast. How I arrived at this conclusion is difficult to explain. Say if you must that there is a directional element to my esp ability, although that hardly explains it." He turned to Peg and I don't know what her question would have been, but he said, "And something beyond explanation. Are you a religious person, Miss Thorsen?"

"I—I can't exactly say. I'm sure I'm not anti-religious."

"Then I'll put it plainly at the risk of completely alienating your sympathies. I have within me a mystic sense I have never been able to explain even to myself. Since childhood I've felt that I had a definite purpose in life—a clear-cut goal—that some duty or mission would someday confront me—a mission I must accomplish at the sacrifice of my life."

These words on paper may sound completely phoney, stilted and unrealistic. That's how they sound to me, reading them back, but I remember, that day in Holloway's room, that they didn't seem that way at all. And I don't think they sounded that way to Peg either. She said, "Why should such a statement alienate us, Mr. Holloway?"

He smiled and spoke quietly. "To me, my statements

sound like the mouthings of a crackpot."

I was half up off my chair with my mouth open almost spilling out some words. Then I choked them off, realizing what I'd been about to do—deny this man's own statement—defend him from his own accusations.

He murmured, "Your restraint is admirable, Mr. Ramsey."

Then Peg spoke up suddenly. "What do you want of us?"

"I thought perhaps you could introduce me to someone in Washington. I went to Washington and sat for three days in anterooms. No one will see me."

"You think we might get you in to see someone in authority?"

"That is my hope. I seek no personal publicity. Had that been the case I would have called other papers also."

—And damned if I wasn't proud that he'd picked us!

Suddenly I had to get out of there. There was some kind of pressure singing around us and I couldn't stand it any more. I looked at Peg and she too seemed in distress.

Holloway said, "That terrible thing lies out there under our waters. It will rise and

destroy us if we do not destroy it first. Please help me."

"We'll see what we can do," I said hurriedly. "Let's go, Peg."

At the door, she hesitated and Holloway said, "Why do I teach esp to these young people? Because we are moving into times when such talents will be imperative to our survival." He raised his eyes to the ceiling, regarding it quietly, thoughtfully, and staring through it. "There are things out there that frighten me—"

He lowered his eyes quickly and said, "Thank you—thank you very much. I'll be waiting—hoping to hear from you..."

It was night and we walked north through the dark side-streets skirting Times Square. We could see its lights, almost hear its brassy blare but it seemed far away and a little insane. Idiots over there, dancing on the wind—laughing hysterically at nothing at all.

Peg stopped suddenly and turned her face. "Are we crazy?"

"I don't know. Are we?"

"I don't know either." I saw her shiver even though the evening was warm. "All I know is that I feel lonely and scared and I want to be kissed."

Held very tight — kissed hard."

I held her tight and kissed her hard until she drew away and laughed shyly. We walked some more. After a while, I said, "We could get him in."

"The Secretary of Defense?"

"Uh-huh."

"That's right, we could."

"You know how?"

"Sure I know how."

We didn't dare look at each other. We didn't have esp but each knew what the other was thinking. And we were ashamed to look at each other — ashamed because we were a couple of tough news kids who wouldn't have admitted at gun-point that we'd been shaken right down to the bottom of our emotional cores.

We walked.

"It would be a good gag," I said virtuously.

"And it might sell newspapers."

She'd finally said it. In our business the be-all and the end-all. The alibi for anything from salving the back of a beaten orphan to ripping a man's private life out of his bosom and holding it bloody and dripping in front of the crowd. Anything goes that sells newspapers.

Peg said, "You want to talk to the old man?"

"Maybe you better brace him. You're young and beautiful."

"Let's do it together."

"Okay. Tomorrow morning?"

"Tomorrow morning. And now, how about a steak?"

"And after?" I asked with disgusting eagerness.

All she did was look at me and smile very sweetly. It was enough.

We went right to the top, which wasn't hard to do at the *Advance*. The Old Man kept it that way. Colonel Maurice Bane. He'd been with Patton in Europe and then had come home and built the limping little *Advance* into quite a newspaper. When there was anybody to be fired, the Old Man did it. He took care of raises and promotions, too.

Peg and I went into his office the next morning and he looked up from competitors' sheets to scowl. "You two married yet?"

I said no.

"Living together?"

Peg said no.

He shook his head. "Can't understand young people today. Waste the best years of their lives. What's your complaint?"

I said, "Last night we interviewed a kind of crackpot

named Holloway. Mental telepathist."

"What's his pitch?"

"Couldn't quite figure it out, Chief, but that's not important. Main thing is the guy's got color—he's running over with it."

"What's he want?"

"An interview with Staley, Secretary of Defense down in Washington. Something about a live bomb lying off the Jersey Coast."

"Sounds like a real nut."

I shrugged and Peg said, "Staley is a prize windbag. Put the two together and it might be fun. I'm sure we could get some good pics and at the worst a page-two feature."

He waved a hand and went back to his paper. "All right—all right. Did you see the *World Telly's* new editorial page layout or do either of you read?"

"It's good," I said loyally, "but not as good as ours."

"That gets you no raises," the Old Man said. "Beat it."

So we gathered up John Hamilton Holloway and went to Washington, the cradle of our liberty or at least where someone's supposed to watch out for our liberty,—the prize political rat race of the world.

It took two days to see Jerrold Staley, our Secretary of

Defense. The President had some pretty able and popular men in his cabinet but Windbag Staley wasn't one of them. He was a loud mouth, a wearer of gaudy uniforms, a poser. The President was well aware of this but was noted for being loyal to his friends. Their association went back to when the President was an obscure judge down in the deep South. Staley had done something for him—so the story ran—and was now reaping his reward.

We got in because the *Advantage* was respected and for no other reason. But that was what we'd banked on and we sat very quiet while Holloway told Staley his story.

Staley listened—I'll give him credit for that — and I took pics with the camera hidden in my tie pin. I wouldn't have played it dirty with any other cabinet member, but I didn't have enough respect for Staley to care.

Holloway talked. Staley listened. Then, after a while, Holloway's shoulders sagged. He looked at Peg and me. "It's no use taking up any more of the Secretary's time," he said, and got up from his chair.

Staley scowled. "You certainly don't expect me to take this hogwash seriously, do you?"

I knew he was getting ready to take his turn on the rostrum so I broke it up quick. I got up and said, "Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary, for giving us your valuable time. We certainly don't want to impose on your further," and I got Peg and Holloway out of the office fast.

We were a sad trio on the return trip. Or at least a sad team. Holloway, after his first disappointment shouldered up well and was our main comfort.

I was annoyed at feeling so let down. What, I asked myself, had I expected? Things had gone the only way they could go with a man like Staley involved. I wasn't surprised so what had I been shooting at? Then I realized. A miracle. We'd shot the moon knowing we would miss but hoping anyhow.

John Holloway said, "Please don't take it so hard. You did your best and now we must wait."

"Wait for what?"

"To see if anything will happen."

"Nothing will happen."

"Then everything will be all right."

"How do you figure that?"

"I could be completely wrong, you know."

"But if you aren't wrong?"

"Then something will surely happen. I'm sure Heaven does not want this nation destroyed."

Peg smiled fondly at Holloway. "How was it put—? 'God moves in ways mysterious, His wonders to perform?' You are a deeply religious man, aren't you?"

"You are too, my dear. Far deeper than you are aware of. I have never met a highly sensitive person who wasn't."

We dropped him off at his place. On the way back to the office Peg looked at me levelly and said, "You believe in what he says, don't you Lee?"

I had to give a little thought before answering. "No, I don't think so. I think I believe in *him* and the other doesn't necessarily follow. I'll believe in him even though nothing ever happens off the Jersey coast."

"I think that sums me up too," Peg said, "except that I'm not so sure he's wrong. I'm not so sure that—" She leaned across suddenly and kissed me and smiled. "Oh, hell! Let's stop off. I'll buy you a *drink*."

So we did.

And it was finished;—all done with; dead as yesterday's bulldog edition. But God moves in ways mysterious—And if that sounds trite then

take away my eagle scout badge and call me a sissy because I'm firmly convinced only God could have found a way to revive this dead herring. And within a week it was red hot news.

Things were running very smoothly all over the world and the newshawks were hungry for tidbits—any little thing that might sell a copy. We'd given the thing space and used a couple of the pics and had caused no stir whatever, but the method of presentation is all-important in such matters and Jerrold Staley was very cozy with a Washington columnist named Piersall. Staley told him the story and Piersall fashioned a stinging little item ridiculing Holloway and slashing at the *Advance* because his stuff appeared in the *Evening Standard*, a sheet chasing our circulation.

Then Winton, a gossip columnist on the *New York Morning Report* saw an opportunity. The *Report* wasn't mad at the *Advance* but Winton and Piersall carried a running feud, so Winton said:

Piersall, the Washington crystal gazer is up to his old tricks—condemning without a hearing. Piersall never met

John Holloway. Piersall, who wouldn't know a mental telepathist from a hole in the garage floor, has never heard Holloway's story. So he condemns him as a crackpot after having two drinks with his nightclub buddy, Secretary of Defense Jerrold Staley. Oh, well—that's our boy Piersall and may he remain ever as stupid. If he got smart he might be competitive . . .

The wrangle caught public interest after Piersall replied and Winton slapped back. They naturally wanted to know who John Holloway was and what he'd been condemned for. So one afternoon, the Old Man called me in.

"This John Holloway—he was our baby, wasn't he?"

"He was."

"Looks like he's being taken away from us."

"Well, we fired our guns—"

"Not our big guns."

"No. You'd have booted me out of the joint. He didn't rate all salvos."

"I want to talk to him."

I got a little scared. The Old Man was practical and after an interview with Holloway he wouldn't take kindly to my

having hatched the Washington egg in the first place. "I don't think you could get much out of him, Chief—"

"But you said he had color."

"Oh, he has, but—"

"And color sells newspapers."

"Oh, it does, but—"

"Two-thirty."

"You want to see him, huh?"

"That's what I've been hinting at. I'd hoped I wouldn't have to state it in so many words."

"Okay—two-thirty." I left, wondering if I ought to clean out my desk immediately or wait until later. I brought Holloway in at two-thirty and the Old Man looked at me and said, "You may leave us, Ramsey."

I went across the street and had three drinks and it was four o'clock. A good time, I decided, for a man to get fired so I went back and knocked on the Old Man's door.

He was sitting at his desk staring straight ahead. His face mirrored deep thought. "We'll play it straight," he said.

I gulped. "We *will*?"

He wasn't paying me any attention. "We won't claim there's anything down there. Just that attention should be given to a matter of such

grave import. I'll write the editorial myself."

This from the Old Man. I tottered out to find Peg. They told me she was interviewing a well known playboy in his hotel suite. That made me mad and I hot-footed over and horned in and stayed until I got her out of there. And women are funny. I expected to get dressed down for real but she was happy about it. She gave me a kiss in the hall and another one in the elevator and then we went to tell Holloway how the wind blew.

We found him alone in his antiseptic school room. He sat holding his head in his hands. When he raised his head we saw his face. It was pale and drawn.

Peg said, "Mr. Holloway! Are you ill?"

"It gets stronger and stronger. I can't tune it out. It frightens me. The thing—whatever it is—must be stirring around. If I could only *know*—"

"You're coming home with me," Peg said firmly.

"Oh, no. I couldn't inconvenience you."

"You're going to bed. We'll play Mozart or Mendelssohn. Maybe we can drown it out. You've got to get some sleep."

We took him to Peg's apart-

ment and put him to bed and after a while he went to sleep. Peg and I sat on the lounge and she went to sleep too, with her head in my lap. I sat up all night, afraid she'd get up and go away if I awakened her.

Two days later, *The Evening Standard*—still hungrily eyeing our circulation, swiped the thunder right out of our guns. Took our baby right away from us while we'd been sitting around publishing nice editorials and getting laughed at.

When I picked an edition of the *Evening Standard* off the newsstand and saw that headline I vented my fury as silently as possible.

But you had to give them credit. They'd been awake while we slept. The *Evening Standard*, it seemed, was going to send a diver down at whatever spot John Holloway indicated, to find his whatever-it-was off the Atlantic coast.

The story was well-written. They were playing it for the comedy effect: a spectacle built for laughter. And laughter sells almost as many newspapers as sex.

I shoved the paper into an ashcan and went to the office to get fired. And I'd be fired all right. The Old Man would rant and rave about this one

and a head or two would fall. Was he paying us to stand around and let thieves come in and steal all the property? Not by seven jugfuls he wasn't.

On the way up I thought of a real sneaky one. I'd shove the blame on Peg. Then she'd be fired. Then she'd have to marry me. Then we could have a home and children.

I discarded the idea as soon as I got it and went into the Old Man's office primed to save her job for her at all costs but not knowing quite how I'd do it.

As it turned out, I didn't have to. I expected to find a ranting bull. Instead I found a quiet, thoughtful man sitting behind his desk, staring into space.

"They stole the show," I said.

He looked up vaguely. "The show?"

"They're taking Holloway under their motherly wing—sending down divers." I eyed him doubtfully. The *Evening Standard*. Haven't you seen it yet?"

"Yes. I saw it."

"Well—?"

"I think it's a brilliant idea."

"But it was their *idea*—not ours."

"That doesn't really matter much—who does it. The main

thing's—it's being done. I've written an editorial congratulating them." He looked at me and I guess I came into his focus for the first time. "Odd, though, that we didn't think of it first, isn't it?"

I stared for a time in amazement. Then I said, "You believe in Holloway, don't you?"

He returned my stare. "Do you?"

"Yes."

"You've got company." He pointed. "In that closet there's a bottle. Get it."

I got it. We drank to John Hamilton Holloway . . .

"And may he be completely wrong," the Old Man said.

The diver went down and came up with nix. He couldn't go deep enough. Newsmen, eager for a story and wanting at least a handful of mud to back the yarn up suggested to Holloway that he select a shallower spot. So long as we weren't going to find anything wouldn't it be just as well to not find it where the diver could hit bottom?

Holloway, pale and wan, stood on the deck of a barge with Peg and myself on either side. The *Evening Standard* had tried to shoulder us out feeling it was their party but Holloway would have none of

that. He shivered and appeared ill but remained adamant as to the spot.

So nothing was found and it looked like the end. But public interest decreed otherwise. The story was white hot the world over. It had caught on the way things like that sometimes do in lulls between big news events. A popular song or two had already been written on the subject—one making the *Hit Parade*—and nightclub comics were having a field day.

The *Evening Standard*, selling out edition after edition, wasn't going to let go—naturally—and the next step was a bathysphere. They hired Lucian Beban; the nationally known expert in that field, and the bathysphere he'd put on the ocean bottom many times.

Holloway wanted to go down with him but the doctor Peg had called in for him refused to allow it. So again we stood on the deck of a tug and watched the big ball, with Beban in it, being lowered off a barge by a big ugly crane. The sky was overcast. It was a perfect afternoon for disaster. And disaster was upon our threshold.

Holloway, standing between Peg and me, shuddered. "It's stirring now," he whispered.

"More active than ever. It's moving."

But all eyes were riveted to the barge and the thin cable taut from the crane's end.

The barge listed violently as something beneath the water pulled the crane down. Quite a few people went overboard as it righted itself. The skipper gave orders and the cable spool went into feverish reverse. We all watched, holding our breath, waiting for sight of that black ball.

Our first thought was of possible accident; still no certainty of anything else. Only on the barge was there certainty. Only there had they heard the voice of Beban cry up in terror over the phone: "Good God! Get me up! Get me up! It's—"

Then we too were sure, as great, heaving swells of water lifted from the ocean's surface. All of us stood frozen except the captain of the tug. He said, "We're getting out of here!" and hit the power. The tug churned and then wallowed north.

We watched. The sea calmed then, like the eye of the hurricane—the lull before the storm. We streaked north. After a while we began to breathe easier. Nothing was going to happen. Some minor phenomenon. The bathysphere

could be salvaged. Anyhow, we told ourselves it could. The barge was pulling away.

Then the thing came up out of the depths.

It reared out of the water and we all stood in a great chained dream. A huge man of steel. No, not a man; a metal monstrosity fashioned by some mad dreamer after the pattern of a man. It heaved up and began to straighten there in the sea and the wonder went through my mind: *When will it stop rising? When will it quit towering up and up and up.* How high had it gone? Two hundred feet? Three hundred? Four hundred? I didn't know. I couldn't judge. Then the rising was complete and it stood there in all its terrifying height. A monster robot, vast beyond conceptions achieved even in the wildest of nightmares.

Ashen-faced, the captain drove north. A white wake streamed behind us as he churned water.

"I would like to go home," John Holloway said.

We were in my car parked at a curb in the Bronx. Holloway's request surprised me but not Peg. Some sort of rapport—some mystic attachment—had sprung up between those two.

"Then we'll take you home," Peg said.

"Just a little while among the familiar things and places."

"Of course."

There was only one business in the country—or in the world for that matter. The fight between the people and the monster. And the people were losing.

It had seemed so simple at first. Knock the thing down with a bomb or a rocket. Tip it off those spindly legs and give our scientists a field day. Its rising was actually hailed with elation by some. Scientific advancement as a result of expected studies would be tremendous.

But the thing could not be knocked over. There was something unseen around it that warded off shell and bomb. It started walking toward the shore. The navy hit it experimentally. It kept on walking. Slowly, as though in the process of awakening from a long sleep. The navy hit it hard. It kept on walking. It stopped on a New Jersey shore village and smashed it into the ground. The navy hit it with everything in the book. It turned north and kept on walking. Slowly. Its left hand was a smasher and it smashed everything it came to. The

right was a pincer that cut every wire and every cable in its path.

The army and the navy joined forces and gave it the old one-two. It kept on walking.

And it seemed to be developing a temper. As though it resented being shot at; yet scientists knew this could not be. It was merely loosening up, getting into stride. Pretty soon it would quit playing.

And it couldn't be stopped.

Washington finally faced this unescapable conclusion. The atom bomb? The hydrogen bomb? No use, the experts said. They based their conclusions on how the thing resisted lesser bombs. They knew they were right. And Washington breathed easier at their decision. A small consolation was involved. They would not be forced to bomb their own country; pulverize and devastate it with the nuclear giants. So far as the thing was concerned the giants were pigmys. They could defeat it only by blasting America out from under it and thus dumping it back into the sea. But would even that be defeat? The experts said not.

Peg and I weren't on the front line. The Old Man had given us our assignment. "Protect Holloway. Get him

out of here. Anything happens to him, I'll frame you for murder."

So we had Holloway north of the Island with the robot clumping up through Jersey picking up ten-story buildings and using them as clubs to smash twenty-story buildings.

"All right," I sighed. "We'll take you home. Where is it?"

It was Sommerville, a tiny town about sixty miles north of New York City. Holloway had a little place there: a house his grandfather had built; the place where he had been born.

Peg and I stayed with him. Peg never took her eyes off him; watching while he roamed about in a world of his own, wandering in the woods, loving the old things, the old familiar places.

I kept track of the robot. It had stopped in Staten Island apparently pondering which way to go. It wandered out into the water and stopped there to think. While thinking, it reached out its right hand and ground all the buildings on lower Manhattan Island to bits. It turned the buildings into dust and let the dust run through its fingers while it rested. And while the Army and Navy and foreign reinforcements continued to take cracks at it. Children tossing

spitballs at a giant—not worth the giant's interest.

Then somebody remembered John Holloway.

I answered the phone. It was Jerrold Staley. I called Holloway and left the room while he talked to Staley. After a while he came out to where Peg and I were waiting.

His face was tragic. He said, "I fled from my duty. I knew what I had to do—what I have to do—but I ran away because I don't want to die."

Peg put her arms around his shoulders. "That's nonsense. You did all you could. You warned them. You can't do any more."

He smiled at her. "I just wanted to come here for the last time. I hoped another way would be found. I hoped the burden could be removed from my shoulders."

"You're talking nonsense!"

"And as a result great damage has been done."

"What did Staley want?" I asked.

"Help. There is no other way." He straightened. "The robot is moving up the Hudson. I think it will hold that course. It tore up the George Washington Bridge after almost demolishing Manhattan and it's moving north—faster

now. I think it will reach Poughkeepsie."

"What do they want you to do?"

"It isn't what they want done—it's what must be done."

"And that—"

"They will meet us at Poughkeepsie—at the bridge. We must hurry."

On the way over he told us, "The robot is a unit they use for demolishing on a major scale. Don't ask me how I know, but that's what it is. Its controls come from an electronic brain built to receive emanations so fine we have no machines that would even record them. Emanations only from a living brain."

We rode the rest of the way in silence.

Staley was waiting at the Poughkeepsie bridge along with some army and navy brass. When we got there we found all eyes riveted on the robot. It was moving up the river. Ripping and tearing as it came; reaching out and sweeping buildings and groups of buildings into rubble as it passed.

"The thing will be here in about fifteen minutes," an army man observed.

Then Holloway got out of the car—he'd been having a

last word with Peg and I could see that she was crying. The group turned to him as one man and it was very strange. No word spoken, no hand raised, yet he was in complete command. They were waiting; for what, they did not know, but they waited like children, looking at him as he looked at the robot. And again I felt that stifling aura of power I had first experienced in Holloway's office. The rest of them were feeling it too.

Holloway stared at the advancing robot for perhaps a minute. Then he said, "Wait here," and began walking out onto the bridge. His words were the mildest of commands but we were rooted. No one would have dreamed of moving. We'd been told not to.

He had a topcoat on and his hands were thrust into the pockets. A fat little man walking across a big bridge. Walking until we couldn't see him very well any more. The bridge at Poughkeepsie is pretty wide. You can't see a man clearly from the shore when he stands in its center and that was where Holloway stopped.

He turned and faced the robot. It was no more than half a mile away now. He turned and faced the robot and just stood there.

Peg got out of the car and one of the brass had thoughtfully handed her a pair of field glasses. She raised them and looked at Holloway. She looked for a long time and then suddenly thrust the glasses at me and hid her face in my shoulder.

I raised the glasses. The robot was closer now. Holloway stood motionless, looking up at it. His face was stiff and unrevealing. His fists were doubled in his pockets. There were droplets oozing out of his forehead and running down his face. But not sweat.

They were drops of blood.

And I realized what was going on. He was attempting to stop the robot by commanding it with his mind. Hurling thought waves at a place in the robot's mechanical brain that he hoped would respond.

I have searched for some kind of comparison. The robot could be controlled by mind-power. But by power from minds of another world; minds beside which ours were elemental scraps of matter dug from a Neanderthal skull. So to what can we compare Holloway? A man trying to do by instinct what it took greater minds perhaps a million years to learn.

And doing it!

The robot stopped. Weaved back and forth uncertainly. Pawed at its head as though something bothered it. Then the arms dropped and you could sense the vitality leaving it as it weaved right and left, tipped far to the left and went crashing down. Once come to rest, half in the Hudson, half on the land, it never moved again.

I looked out across the bridge and saw that Holloway had fallen also. And that Peg was running toward him. I ran after Peg. Everyone else stood rooted. Nobody thought of using the cars. Staley and the brass stood staring at the fallen robot; perhaps praying it would not move.

When I got there, Peg had Holloway's head in her lap. She was wiping the blood from his face. "He's dead," she said dully. "He knew he would die. He knew the effort of stopping the robot would burst his own brain. Yet he did it. He could have run. He could have said nothing. But he came here and died."

Later they found that four thin silver wires in the robot's brain box had been broken by Holloway's gigantic effort.

He had thrown his mind at the robot and killed it.

(Concluded on page 47)

THIS WAY OUT

By IVAR JORGENSEN

So you want to get out of jail. Well all you gotta do is first meet a guy named Ryn—like in Rin Tin Tin only not a movie star—and he will give you the low-down. It's very tricky and involves getting to be a guard in the crib where you're doing time. This guard's got a dream of a wife, see? and—oh, boy!

RYN the Martian laughed. It was a dry hacking laugh. It sounded as if Ryn had tuberculosis, which was decidedly possible since the thin but great-chested Martians, accustomed to the dry cold air of their native planet, often developed pulmonary diseases on Venus.

"What's so funny?" Tom Draper asked his leathery-skinned companion as they left the Venusian jungle behind and entered the prison compound.

"You are," Ryn said. He was shorter than Draper and didn't have half Draper's weight and although he could

glide through the Venusian jungle like a ghost, the sapping, humid heat and thick, carbon-dioxide-choked atmosphere always left him gasping at the end of the long day.

"You're a maximum security prisoner in a maximum security prison," Ryn said. "But you—"

"Aren't we all? That's why we're here."

"But you don't show any interest when I talk of escaping. You like it here?"

"Don't mention escape to me," Draper said angrily as they neared the square bulk of their barracks in the deepening gloom of the Venusian

dusk. "That's the way to go crazy. No one can escape from Venusian Penal and I know it and you know it. If you think about escape hard enough in an escape-proof prison, you go off your rocker."

Ryn laughed again, but the laughter brought on a coughing spell and for several moments Draper supported the small figure of his companion while he coughed. Then Ryn gasped, "To a point, you're right. If Venusian Penal is escape-proof."

"You know it is."

"For an animal, it's escape-proof."

"Is that supposed to be funny?"

"I only remind you that you're a human being. You don't merely have a body. You have a mind. And the mind of man, Martian or Earthman, can accomplish much. To the mind of man there is no such thing as an escape-proof prison."

"No one ever escaped from Venusian Penal."

"You're talking like a child," Ryn said as they entered the barracks and sat down together on Draper's cot, waiting for the dinner whistle. It was very hot in there. It was hot everywhere on Venus, and Draper

scratched mechanically at the heat rash which covered the skin of his body. "You're talking like a child," Ryn repeated, "because one of the attributes of a perfect escape is this: no one must know you have escaped."

Draper's eyes opened wider. "Keep talking. I liked the sound of that. You mean you claim there are people who have escaped from Venusian Penal; only we don't know about it?"

"Sure," said Ryn. "They merely switched places with some of the local gentry."

"By local gentry you mean guards and prison officials and their families and so on?"

"That's right. Why do you think the turnover of prison personnel is so great?"

"That's easy," Draper replied. "Because no one likes to stay on this God-forsaken planet for long."

Ryn shook his head. "The pay is very high," he said. "The turnover is so great because ex-prisoners inhabiting the bodies of the local gentry are in a hurry to get off Venus."

"You mean they switch places mentally?" Draper asked. "Like I take over the warden's body and the warden takes over mine and even



Jamison set himself as Draper raised the jagged bottle.

if he rants and raves in my body nobody will believe him, they'll just think he's nuts?"

Ryn nodded his head. "Now you've got the idea. Want to try it?"

"You're breaking my heart," Draper said. "Just talking about it can drive a man crazy."

"But I'm perfectly serious, Draper."

"Me, the warden," Draper mused. "I can just see it. You know something, Ryn? I shouldn't really complain about this maximum security life imprisonment setup. In the old days they would have gassed me or electrocuted me."

"What did you do?"

"Armed robbery aboard a space-liner. The damn captain resisted and I had to kill him." Draper spat furiously. He was a tall, muscular man in his late thirties, with a hard, craggy, impassive face. "He must of been out of his mind," Draper went on. "What did he care? It wasn't his spaceship; it only belonged to the company. But he had to get himself killed and send me here. How do you like that?"

"What's the difference?" Ryn said philosophically. "I'm here for murder, too. The important thing is to get out."

"Yeah, sure," Draper said. "But you haven't said how."

"Do you know anything about hypnosis, Draper?"

"Some. I saw a sideshow out in the 'roids featuring it."

"The important thing is that the subject must believe. No one can be hypnotized who does not believe the hypnotist can do it to him. You follow?"

"I'm listening."

"In six thousand years of civilization on your planet and thirty thousand on mine, they've never been able to determine exactly what the mind is. Electrical impulses? Perhaps. At any rate, it is nothing physical. It can move with the speed of thought and no chains can shackle it. If you believe, Draper, I am prepared to deliver us from maximum security tonight."

"You know something, Ryn? You're nuts. You're nuts, but you've got me listening. If it's so easy for you to switch minds around like that, what do you need me for?"

"Assume the operation takes a magnet. A magnet needs a plus and a minus pole, doesn't it? I speak by analogy, of course. The operation bears no real relationship to magnetism, you understand."

"Can the double-talk,"

Draper said. "Can you really do it?"

"I believe so."

"All right," Draper smiled. "Make me the warden. I want to see how the other half lives." Draper smiled again. Smiling like that, his face became animated. It was a cold, ruthless smile but it was the only time Draper's craggy face became anything but impassive.

"You don't understand. I can't predict with what mind you'll switch. But since the guards and penal officers and their families outnumber the convicts approximately three to one, chances are it will be with a free man."

"You got it all figured out, haven't you? Too bad you can't guarantee I'd be the warden, though. I'd really like that."

"I'll settle for anyone," Ryn said happily. "As long as he's free. As long as he doesn't have this cough. As long as he's young enough to appreciate a woman, Martian or Earthwoman, it doesn't matter. Do you realize it's been six long, dreary years since I've even *touched* a woman?"

"A regular Martian Don Juan," Draper said, smiling again. "Well, when do we

start? Not that I believe you, but what the hell."

"Any time you wish."

"How long will it take, Ryn?"

"Why, no time at all. You merely make your mind passive and receptive, thinking of nothing, while I free both our minds from the nexus of their brains."

"Hey, where did you find out about all this, anyway?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I read about it in the prison library."

"You're crazy. They wouldn't keep a book like that there."

"Ordinarily they wouldn't. But what if someone had knowledge of such an escape path before us and left the book there, to be found by future prisoners, after he was free? It would be a kind of poetic justice on an escape-proof prison, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah," Draper said. "I guess it would. Listen, Ryn. Don't think I'm a sap. Don't think I really believe your story. But what the hell, there's nothing to lose."

"You mean you'll try it."

"Sure I mean I'll try it."

"You'll thank me the rest of your life, Draper," Ryn said excitedly, and coughed. When the spasm subsided, he added, "You are ready now?"

"Ready as I'll ever be. You want me just to sit here and think of nothing?"

"That's right. Make your mind go blank," Ryn said in a slow, soothing voice. "As you do while working in the jungle, while extracting sap ten hours a day in a hundred and fifty degree heat. To think is madness. You must not think. You merely subsist, as an animal. You go through the motions but you do not think because if you think you will feel and then the heat will get you. Can you do it? Can you reproduce that exactly?"

Draper shut his eyes. He could feel his jaw muscles going slack and realized it was almost as if Ryn had hypnotized him. But, he thought, I shouldn't be thinking. It won't work if I think. But thinking I shouldn't be thinking is thinking too. I must think of absolutely nothing. Nothing. Blankzero-nothingness . . .

In Draper's mind, and in Ryn's, something went *snap*.

"... off duty now too. Give you a lift?"

The voice was a drone in his ears, but the words did not register. He was standing under the cold needle spray of a shower. It felt wonderful

and he kept his eyes closed and wanted to stand there like that forever.

"What do you say, Taylor?"

"Huh? What was that?"

Draper asked, opening his eyes. The man who had spoken was standing under an adjacent shower nozzle, a blond young man in his early twenties, a guard named Jamison. Draper had seen him before, had been given orders by him, had wanted to strike him. He checked the impulse now. It would have been ridiculous for now he, Draper, was a guard too. A guard named Taylor. He knew Taylor, had seen Taylor in the corridors of the maximum security prison. Taylor, a man in his early forties, dumpy, grumpy, inconspicuous. Just the sort of sour-looking, disillusioned-looking little man who might decide, on impulse, to quit his job at Venusian Penal and return to civilization and Earth . . .

"I said, how would you like a lift home? My swampmobile's right outside, Ralph."

Ralph. Ralph Taylor, guard. Ryn had been serious. The consumptive Martian had done the impossible, had somehow transferred Draper's mind to Ralph Taylor's brain, and the guard's to Draper's.

"Thanks a lot," Draper said, grateful for the opportunity the young, handsome Jamison had given him. Obviously, Jamison knew in which of the swamp-settlements he, Taylor, lived. Jamison could drive him home. Once there he would have to feel his way, but it was a start. It was a very lucky start. "I'll be ready in about ten minutes."

"I'll meet you outside," Jamison said.

Less than fifteen minutes later, Jamison's squat swampmobile was lumbering through the muck toward the first of the swamp-settlements. Both Taylor and Jamison wore the insignia of high-ranking non-commissioned officers of the penal colony on the sleeves of their uniforms and Draper smiled smugly. Even if Jamison had not offered him a lift, he would have tried the closest swamp-settlement first. With Taylor's rank, it figured.

"This good enough?" Jamison asked in a friendly voice. He pulled the swampmobile up in the central lake of the settlement. "I'd take you to your door, only I'm in a hurry."

"Sure," Draper said. "This is fine. Thanks a million, Jamison."

He climbed out of the swampmobile and went up the steps to the roadway of the bridge that spanned the lake. Somewhere nearby, a large generator throbbed. Electric lights, generator-driven, pulsed and glowed in the encroaching Venusian night. But since to get lost in the swamp country was very often fatal, the strategically located lights lifted the veil of darkness completely.

Happily, with a feeling of freedom and ease he hadn't known since his imprisonment on Venus three years ago, Draper set out upon one of the connecting bridges. On either side of him every several hundred yards or so, a ramp led down to a small cluster of circular swamp dwellings. The next step would be easy, Draper discovered. For at the head of each ramp were name cards for the tenants of each of the occupants of the houses below.

He found his own on the fifth left ramp, and scowled.

It said: *Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Taylor.*

A wife. A wife was very bad. A wife could ruin everything. Because a wife would know all the intimate details of a man's life. A wife would realize something was wrong. If Taylor had only been a

bachelor, Draper found himself thinking glumly, he could have got away with it. Now, suddenly, he wasn't so sure.

He almost decided to return to the penal colony and call home and give some excuse. But that would only postpone things and possibly make his unknown wife suspicious. Shrugging but nervous, Draper went down the ramp to his home and his wife.

It was a round plastiglass dwelling immune to the Venusian swamprot. Draper found a lock-needle in the pocket of his uniform and opened the door. A wonderful breath of cool air greeted him. The small house was air-conditioned.

Draper looked about uncertainly at the conventional, stereotyped furniture. A punk like Taylor would select furniture like that, he thought. His wife is probably a cow-faced dog, middle-aged, nagging, with the loud, screeching voice of a shrew. Well, Draper decided, he'd ditch the old lady as soon as they got to Earth. He wouldn't waste any time about it. Tonight, this very night, he would tell her they were leaving Venusian Penal as soon as possible.

He took a deep breath and called, "I'm home."

There was a silence, then her voice came to him from the other end of the house. First a door opened and then Draper heard a hiss of water, then Taylor's wife said, "I'm taking a shower, Ralph."

Her voice surprised Draper. It was a deep vibrant voice for a woman, but Draper liked the sound of it. A contralto voice. The kind of voice that belonged, Draper thought, to a tall, statuesque, Nordic girl—

"You're nuts, pal," he told himself. "Even if Mrs. Taylor has a nice voice, she'll be a dog."

He moved on through the small house and the hissing sound of the shower became louder. "Did you say something, Ralph?" Taylor's wife asked.

"Not me."

"I can't hear you. Open the door, will you?"

He did so. He was very nervous now. Would she suspect something? Would his behavior give him away? He opened the door and peered inside.

The shower stall was of slightly translucent glass. Taylor's wife, *his* wife now, was inside, showering. She was tall, taller than Taylor. She had long blonde hair and was lathering her hair now.

Her legs were long and straight and lithely curved, firm and white like alabaster. Her hips flared broadly, beautifully. She had a flat narrow waist and high conical breasts. Nordic woman, Draper thought breathlessly. A knockout.

"Well, I'm home," he said foolishly.

"All I have to do is heat supper. We'll be eating in fifteen minutes. Why don't you grab a beer?"

"Good idea," Draper mumbled. He got out of there in a hurry. His hands were trembling, his pulses hammering. Ditch her, hell, he thought. We'll leave Venus, all right. But the little woman goes where I go. He felt the muscles of Taylor's face forming a grin. Some little woman.

She joined him fifteen minutes later, as he finished his beer. She wore a hostess gown slit to mid-thigh on one side. Her face was gorgeous and suddenly he began to wonder why she had ever married a pudgy, uninspiring man like Taylor, who was almost old enough to be her father.

He put down his beer, got up, and kissed her. Her red lips clung briefly and coolly, he thought. Probably, though,

it was his fault. He still felt nervous. He didn't even know her first name.

"Baby," he said, "sometimes I wonder how you ever married a guy like me."

He knew it was the wrong thing to say. A man would never say that about himself. A man in another man's body, yes, but until Ryn had spoken to him this afternoon, he had not known such a thing was possible.

"Let's not go into that," the woman said. She said it coldly, as if she agreed with Draper. "Let's just say I was young and didn't know what I was getting myself into."

"Well, you listen now," Draper said enthusiastically. "Things are going to be different from now on. I'll bet you hate Venus. Don't you?"

"Not particularly. I guess I finally got used to it."

"As soon as I can hand in my resignation, we're getting off of this hell-hole and back to civilization. Back to Earth. Happy?"

"Ralph, what's got into you? You never talked that way before. You always talked how in ten more years you'd earn your retirement pay, and then we could think about returning to Earth and leading the kind of life we always wanted to lead."

"Are you kidding? In ten years I'll be an old man."

The woman looked at him scornfully. "Then think of your wife. In ten years I'll still be in my early thirties. I'll have most of my life ahead of me. I'll know how we ought to spend your retirement pay, Ralph."

"You're talking crazy. We'll leave here as soon as we can and—"

"We're not leaving anyplace. I said I didn't mind Venus."

"But—"

"In the beginning it was different. You know that. In the beginning, right after we were married, I didn't want to come back here with you. It's not so bad, you said. You'll get used to it. The money is good. The retirement benefits are excellent. What made you change your mind so suddenly, Ralph?"

It was another mistake, he thought. He should have felt her out on the subject first. But since he had already gone this far, there was no turning back. "You did," he said. "Just looking at you, that's all. You're too beautiful to spend the best years of your life at Venusian Penal. Look in the mirror some time. Don't you know you're beautiful?"

"You're wasting your breath, Ralph. I won't leave Venus."

"But—"

"You dragged me here. I finally got used to it. Now we're going to stay until I say it's time to leave. Do you understand that?"

Nodding slightly, Draper attacked his supper. It was lousy. Taylor's blonde wife was a lousy cook.

He forgot all about her cooking when they retired for the night, though. Even if her responses were cold, they were still the responses of a beautiful woman.

As the days passed and Draper grew accustomed to his role as Ralph Taylor, he never again broached the subject of resigning his job and leaving Venus. There was no hurry. It could wait. He had learned his wife's first name, which was Jeanne. He had learned most of Taylor's personal habits. He actually enjoyed his job as a maximum security guard. Turnabout, he thought. It was almost as if he was sadistic. If the cons only knew it was Draper bossing them around . . .

He saw a lot of the young, handsome Jamison. Jamison was a bachelor and often

dined with them. It seemed to be a routine of the Taylor household and Draper did not want to change routines which existed before he had taken over Taylor's body. But even though he liked Jamison, he was sometimes annoyed when the younger man remained on until all hours, sharing the company of his wife.

Occasionally he wondered about the real Taylor. Probably, he was slowly going crazy. He knew who he was: he was Ralph Taylor, a guard. But he could never prove it. If he announced it publicly, if he insisted, they would adjudge him insane and send him to the mental ward. That is, they would adjudge the convict Draper insane . . .

He wondered about Ryn, too. Somewhere in Venusian Penal, there had been another switch. Somewhere, Ryn was going through the same kind of adjustments Draper faced. Good old Ryn, who had given Draper his freedom.

One day soon after the luckless Jamison had been put on night duty, Draper's security shift was released early in the afternoon. He purchased a bottle of wine at the commissary and thought he would surprise the beautiful Jeanne. She was

younger than he, and beautiful. He'd need little surprises like that to keep their relationship on an even keel, especially since she had seemed to grow colder and colder toward him as the days passed. Was she suspicious? He didn't think so. If she was, she was an incredibly good actress. Probably, it was just the coldness a young, beautiful woman might feel toward her almost middle-aged husband. Well, he'd been around. He knew what to do. Wine and candle-light today, flowers tomorrow. He would woo her all over again if necessary, and then talk about resigning his job and returning with her to Earth.

He entered the house quietly, since he wanted to surprise Jeanne with the wine. He brought it into the kitchen and put it in the wall-refrigerator to chill it. He put glasses in there to chill them, too. His uniform and blaster-belt felt uncomfortable, but they lent a certain amount of military strength to his pudgy figure and he did not take them off.

He sat down and smoked a cigarette and when he thought the wine had been sufficiently chilled took it from the refrigerator and set it on the table with the chilled

glasses. "Jeanne," he called cheerfully, "I'm home early, darling. Look what I brought home, Jeanne." He waited for the sound of her step.

At first he heard nothing. Then a door slammed and in a moment Jeanne entered the kitchen. Her face was flushed, her hair disarrayed. She wore her hostess gown. She looked angry.

"Why didn't you call from the Colony?" she said.

"I wanted to surprise you. The wine—" he said lamely, looking at the table. "I've been home for a while, chilling it and everything."

"How long were you here?"

"Oh, half an hour, I guess. You don't have to get excited."

"Ralph, were you spying on me? Aren't I entitled to any privacy at all?"

"I didn't know you felt that way."

"I feel that way. I don't want to drink your wine. You can drink it yourself or spill it out or do anything you want."

"Jeanne."

"Don't you Jeanne me."

"It's Venus," he said. "Venus has you, Jeanne, that's all. The heat, the atmosphere. It gets to people. If you're smart you'll say the word and

come home to Earth with me, where we both belong."

"That's impossible. I already told you."

"You'll be your old self again on Earth."

"Why are you bringing it up now? Are you taunting me?"

"Taunting you? I don't get it."

"You can't fool me, Ralph."

"All I said is we ought to return to Earth."

"I'll never return to Earth. With you."

"I'll bite. What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know what it's supposed to mean. You've been spying."

"Listen, baby—"

"And don't call me that! I hate when you call me that. Our marriage is a farce now. You know that, don't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Pease don't give me that, Ralph. You're home early. You were spying on us."

Draper did not answer her. He sat still and looked at the wine on the table, at the beads of moisture on the outside of the bottle. Us, she had said. Us.

He waited.

"You don't deny it?" she said. "You were spying on us?"

He said nothing. He was still waiting. A knot tightened deep in his stomach and he thought, wildly, do I actually love this girl? Have I let myself fall in love with her? He did not know. It was too soon, too unexpected. But if she had been unfaithful to him . . .

"Jamie," she called suddenly. "He knows, Jamie. You might as well come out."

Draper heard footsteps and in a few seconds Jamison entered the kitchen. He was wearing Draper-Taylor's own lounging robe and it was too small for him.

"Well, well, well," Draper heard himself saying. "Cozy, aren't you?"

"I'm sorry, Ralph," Jamison said. "Your wife and I are in love. She wants to divorce you and marry me. Tell him, Jeanne."

Jeanne nodded. "That's right, Ralph."

"They didn't put you on night shift," Draper accused the younger man. "You volunteered for it yourself."

"I guess I kind of did at that," Jamison said.

Draper felt numb. There was no reaction yet. It was too soon for reaction. But when he did react, he knew it would be violently.

"Will you give me a divorce?" Jeanne asked. "I'm too young for you. I realize that now. Don't you realize it?"

"How long has—this been going on?" Draper asked in a soft voice.

"We were always attracted to each other, Jamie and I," Jeanne said. "I'll have to admit that. But it's funny. He was shy. He was always shy, until suddenly—"

"When?" Draper asked, understanding welling up abruptly within him.

"Why, Jamie suddenly became bolder just around the time you first broached the subject of returning to Earth. I said no then because I was hopeful, and the very next day . . ." Her voice trailed off and she looked at Jamison with adoration in her eyes.

"Be a good scout," Jamison said. "Will you give her her freedom?"

Instead of answering, Draper laughed. He laughed for a long time and then stopped all at once. All the mirth had drained out of him and his face looked bleak.

"You're not going to be ugly about it?" Jamison said.

"Get out of here."

"You're only postponing things."

"I said get out of here. Get out or I'll throw you out."

"You throw him out?" Jeanne asked incredulously. "You couldn't even throw *me* out."

"Don't get ugly," Jamison suggested again.

But Draper went up to the younger, bigger man and shook his fist in front of the handsome face. "Are you going to get out?" he cried.

He continued to shake his fist. It struck Jamison's jaw a glancing blow and Jamison swung his own fist and knocked Draper down.

"Jamie," Jeanne said. "You shouldn't have. He looks wild. He's just liable to hurt you. If—if you were hurt, I couldn't live."

Hearing her talk like that enraged Draper. He wanted to hurt Jamison now. He had to hurt Jamison. He got up and staggered toward the table. When he reached it he picked up the bottle of wine by its neck and slammed it down across the edge of the table. The glass shattered, the wine splashed like purple blood.

And Draper held a deadly weapon of jagged glass in his hand. With it he lunged at Jamison.

He swung the jagged glass, using the neck of the bottle as

a handle. It sliced across Jamison's face and Jamison screamed, clawing at his cheek and falling down. He hit the floor whimpering, the whole left side of his face torn and bloody.

There was a sound behind Draper. He whirled—too late.

A wild light burned in Jeanne's eyes. She advanced toward Draper with a bread knife, its edge gleaming in the bright light. He stood for a moment, watching her. He still held the jagged remains of the bottle in his hand, but his moment of waiting was fatal. Jeanne looked at Jamie and whimpered in sympathy with his whimpering and then plunged the knife to its hilt in Draper's stomach.

Draper sighed and collapsed. He hit the floor on his back and stayed there. He knew he was dying. There was a numbness inside him and the numbness was spreading. When it reached his head, he would be dead.

"You—were—shy, Jamison," he managed to say. "But all of . . . a sudden—you grew—bold with—her."

"Yes," Jamison said.

"When you took me—home that day—you let me—off at the—lake because you didn't know — exactly — where — I lived." He was very weak

now. His vision blurred. He could barely see Jeanne kneeling by Jamison, administering to him. He had to finish and then the pain and the numbness would merge and he would die.

"You didn't—know where—I lived because—because you—weren't Jamison. Jamison would—have known. You're Ryn."

"And you—" the injured man gasped.

Draper clawed the blaster

from his belt and steadied it at Jamison's figure with both his hands. If he died—and he knew he was dying—Ryn had to die too. "Admit it," he said.

"I'm Ryn," Jamison said in a shocked voice. "And you—you're Draper."

"I'm Draper," he said. "It looks like there's—no escape—after all."

"There's no escape."

Jeanne screamed. Draper pulled the trigger and died.

THE END

CALL HIM COLOSSUS

So we buried him and came back down the narrow stony road alone—Peg and I.

Later, standing by the huge pile of steel on the Hudson, some reporter who still couldn't believe it whistled and muttered. Get *that!* Man! Just call him Colossus!"

"Yeah," I said. Only I was thinking of a fat, kindly little man standing all alone in the middle of an empty bridge with drops of blood running down his face. "Call *him* Colossus."

So that's where we stand. The research didn't help much. We learned how they did it but not how the protecting force field was created.

(Concluded from page 32)

And too, if we could construct such a robot, there are no minds on this earth capable of controlling it. We once had a man who could but he's gone.

You remember, I said I didn't know the real beginning of this story—nor the end. I wishfully made it that they dropped one robot and then raced for home never to return. But who knows? Maybe they just went back for some special equipment they needed to wipe us out. Or maybe they dropped a dozen of those monsters here and there under our sea.

That's the riddle.

Sleep well, friend.

THE END

THIS WAY OUT

47

Better Change Your Mind

By C. H. THAMES

A summit meeting had been scheduled. All the top nations were sending their best men. The Russians, the French, and the English were all set to get all the things that would be advantageous to the Russians and the French and the English. But we would not be too ably represented because our President and Secretary of State would be two other guys!

SHE was the prettiest woman I'd ever seen. She could have won a beauty contest or a Hollywood contract, with a face as provocative as Mona Lisa's and a figure meant more for a bathing suit than the severely tailored suit she was wearing.

"I teach the fourth grade

in Pnixit Bobnia," she said.

I offered her the client chair and she sat down, crossing lovely legs. She looked at the girlie calendar on the desk and smiled. I smiled too: it had nothing on her. She took in the water cooler and the battered metal filing cabinet which holds mostly air and





She ran forward carrying the most important pill in the world.

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the reversed lettering on the inside of the pebbled glass door which, if you could read reversed lettering, said *Steve Spruce, Confidential Investigations*.

"In where?" I said.

"Prixit Bobnia. But it doesn't matter, does it?"

"You're the client," I said. "But I never heard of Prixit Bobnia."

"It isn't much of a town."

"Far from here?"

"You mean, in space?"

"How else could it be far?"

"Oh, it's very close in space."

"I thought I knew the Virginia and Maryland countryside around Washington," I said. "But I never heard of Prixit Bobnia."

"Mr. Spruce, you have been recommended to me as the best private detective in Washington."

I beamed on that one. "Who did the recommending?"

"An historian I know."

"You mean, somebody who writes history?"

"Of course. That's a historian, isn't it?"

"Lady, I don't get it. I never heard of Prixit Bobnia. I don't know any historians. What gives?"

"Gives, Mr. Spruce? I'm not sure I—"

"Forget it," I said.

"Maybe we had better concentrate on what we both understand. I want a private detective to do some work for me. You see, I was taking the Prixit Bobnian fourth graders on an educational tour of Washington, when the two worst delinquents in the class disappeared."

"Disappeared? You mean, they wandered off somewhere."

"Oh, I know where they are now."

"Look, Miss," I said. "In the first place, the police would help you find your missing pupils. Among other things, that's what they're for. In the second place, you say you know where the kids are. Either way, you don't need me."

I stood up. I walked to the door and opened it. The day was warm and over at Griffith Stadium the Senators were entertaining Casey Stengel's crew. I figured I might do better over there. But the school teacher from Prixit Bobnia got up, meandered in a very un-school-teacherish way toward me, put her arms around my neck, drew my head down and pressed her warm red lips against my mouth . . .

"There," she said. "I do so need you."

"Where," I said, "did you learn that?"

She sat down in the client chair again. I sat down in the desk chair. "Oh, I wouldn't approach anything like this cold," she told me. "I read a few private detective novels before I came here. Would five thousand dollars be enough, Mr. Spruce?"

"Five thousand? For what?"

"To tell my two juvenile delinquents to rejoin the class so we can finish the tour and go home to Prixit Bobnia."

"Prixit Bobnia," I said.

"Will you do it?"

"Exactly where are the two boys now?"

"You're not going to believe this."

"Try me."

"Maybe I ought to tell you where Prixit Bobnia is first."

I shrugged. "For five thousand dollars, you can tell me anything."

"Oh, no. You get the five thousand dollars only if Lar and Torku rejoin the class."

I said that sounded fair enough. I added, "All right, so tell me. Where's Prixit Bobnia?"

"Why, right here, more or less."

"Here, in Washington?"

"Where Washington was located."

"Was located?"

"I mean to say, where it is located now, but where it *was* located where I come from. You see, Mr. Spruce, Prixit Bobnia exists on this geographical spot — four-hundred-and-fifty-seven-thousand years in the future."

I was in the process of lighting a cigarette. I coughed on the smoke. I said, "All right, I shouldn't have asked. Now, what about Lar and Torku?"

"Our fourth grade class consists of twenty-two children. Twenty, without Lar and Torku. It's very educational to take them on a tour of the distant past, don't you think? You see, my fiance runs a time-travel agency, so it was very simple to arrange everything. We're staying at the Mayflower Hotel, Mr. Spruce."

I made a mental note to check on that.

"But yesterday, while we were visiting the White House, Lar and Torku disappeared. They had been threatening to do it all along, you see."

"In the White House?"

"Someplace important. They said, 'Miss Chalker'—

but it doesn't matter what they said. Does it?"

"Let's get to the point, Miss Chalker," I suggested. I didn't believe a word of it, but Miss Chalker had such an earnest expression on her face I didn't have the heart to stop her.

"All right. Lar and Torku disappeared in the White House yesterday. They had stolen two empathy tablets from my supply."

"Empathy tablets?"

Miss Chalker nodded. She opened a compact little handbag and took out a small, narrow-necked bottle. It was as clear as glass but looked soft like squeeze-plastic. Inside were a lot of pills half the size of aspirins. "They don't look like much," Miss Chalker said, "do they?"

I readily agreed.

"But they're empathy pills, Mr. Spruce. You take them and you can inhabit somebody else's mind. That's what Lar and Torku did, you see?"

"Whose mind did they, uh, inhabit?"

"I can tell you're making fun of me. You don't believe me."

"Miss Chalker—"

"That's all right. I can prove what I say. Because if Lar and Torku inhabited

their minds, that means *they* are inhabiting Lar and Torku's bodies. I can show you Lar and Torku for proof."

"I thought you said they were missing."

"Only their minds. You're not following me, Mr. Spruce."

I was beginning to think I would rather tackle Red agents, as I have done on several different occasions. I said, "Who are they inhabiting?"

"As you know, Mr. Spruce, the meeting at the summit between the chiefs of state of the three top Western powers on the one hand and Soviet Russia on the other is about to take place. Lar and Torku wanted to be in on it, but they're only nine years old. Thus, the only way—"

"Was to inhabit someone else's body. Whose, Miss Chalker?"

Miss Chalker took a deep breath. It did nice things to the upper regions of her torso. "Lar," she told me in a frightened voice, "is now the U. S. Secretary of State. Torku, I'm afraid, is the President of the United States."

I sat there. Miss Chalker sat there. Finally, Miss Chalker said, "If you don't help

me, what am I going to do, Mr. Spruce?"

I thought I should have suggested a good psychiatrist. I watched Miss Chalker return the bottle of empathy pills to her handbag. She sniffed and took out a handkerchief and patted the tip of her nose. "Don't just sit there," she said.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Tell me what you think. No, never mind," she added hastily after a quick look at my face. "At least come with me to the Mayflower Hotel. I'll show you Lar and Torku. You can just imagine how the Secretary of State and the President feel, stuck in nine-year-old bodies."

"Yeah, sure," I said.

"Will you meet me at the Mayflower later this afternoon?"

"Well—" Like the private eyes in the pocket-sized books you read, I guess I'm a sucker for a pretty girl. In my line of work I have on occasion told United States Senators no. I could not bring myself to tell Miss Chalker no. It is an occupational hazard.

"Here," said Miss Chalker, opening her handbag again. She took out a single bill and gave it to me. "On account," she said. "You call it a re-

tainer in your business, don't you?"

"Yeah," I said. I looked at the bill she had given me. I had only seen one or two like it before in my life. It was a five-hundred-dollar bill.

"A retainer," I said after a while. "That's right."

"Splendid, Mr. Spruce. Then you may consider yourself retained. I'll see you at the Mayflower this afternoon. Say, at four?"

I nodded. I wondered if she was going to kiss me again. She had read the right books for it. She did not kiss me again.

"Ah, yes," the room clerk at the Mayflower Hotel said at four o'clock. "Miss Chalker and her class from the Prixit Bobnia school. They have several adjoining rooms on the sixth floor, Mr. Spruce. You may use the house phones on your right."

"That's all right. They expect me."

"Oh, Mr. Spruce," the room clerk said. "I was always meaning to ask someone who might know. Did you ever hear of Prixit Bobnia? Where on Earth could it be?"

"Of course I heard of it," I said, for no reason other than perversity. I didn't add that I had heard of it only

from the lips of the alleged fourth-grade teacher of the Pritx Bobnia school. Well, you don't tell all your secrets, do you?

The elevator took me up to the sixth floor. I was the only passenger. "Kids," said the elevator operator. "Sometimes I wish they never was invented. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Like only today. This here kid taps me on the back and says the President of the United States and the Secretary of State are in his room incognito, disguised as two other kids. What the hell are you gonna do? Well, here's your floor, mister."

I walked down the corridor and found the room I was looking for. I stood outside the door for a moment and lit a cigarette. I almost didn't want to go in. I still had Miss Chalker's five-hundred-dollar retainer and it was so nice to know I had it. But the moment Miss Chalker's little joke was exploded, I would have to return the money to her. I sighed and knocked on the door.

A kid of eight or nine opened it for me. The room was large and full of kids. They were making a lot of noise but became quiet when

I entered the room. One of them came up to me and sneered, "So you're the shamus."

"I guess so," I said.

"I read all about you in Dodster's History of Twentieth Century Criminology, shamus."

"That's nice," I said. "Who are you, Lar or Torku?"

"Not me, shamus. I'm disappointed in you. How could I be Lar or Torku? Lar's body is inhabited by the Secretary of State and Torku's by—"

"Yeah, I know."

"Believe me, shamus, they are boiling. Ain't they, gang?"

In general, the gang agreed. "See?" the boy who had answered the door said. "I'm Olto, shamus. And I got something you'd like to see."

"What's that?"

"A picture of you from Dodster's History of Twentieth Century Criminology. I got it right here in the night-table somewhere." He began to rifle through a night-table drawer.

"Never mind," I said. "Some other time, Olto. Could you tell Miss Chalker I'm here?"

Just then, a door on the right hand wall of the room opened and Miss Chalker came through. She was wear-

ing an off-the-shoulder sweater which revealed a lot of lovely sun-tanned skin above the throat and clung like paint to a statue below it.

"There you are, Mr. Spruce," she said. "I was beginning to think you wouldn't come."

Olto giggled. "You ought to stick around and see the picture," he advised me.

For some reason, Miss Chalker's face got very red. "Not now, Olto!" she cried. "Mr. Spruce wants to see Lar and Torku. Don't you, Mr. Spruce?"

I nodded. I could almost feel the presence of the five-hundred dollar bill in my wallet. Unfortunately, it wouldn't be there very long.

"Come with me, please," Miss Chalker said. I followed her through the bathroom which connected the room Olto shared with a dozen or so other kids with the next room in line. There were only two boys there. It was hard to tell them apart. Both were good-looking, freckle-faced, tousle-haired, and blue-eyed. Their faces were set in very grim lines, and that seemed surprising.

"That's Lar," Miss Chalker said, pointing to the boy who was pacing back and forth near the window. "And that,"

she said, pointing to the other boy, "is Torku." The other boy was absent-mindedly swinging an imaginary golf club at an imaginary golf ball on the rug.

"Mr. President," Miss Chalker said, "this is Stephen Spruce."

The golf-playing little fellow dropped his imaginary club and came over to me. Before he could speak, the other boy sprinted in my direction and said, "You understand, Mr. Spruce, everything is top-secret. On the eve of the Big Four meeting, it can't be made known that the President of the United States is inhabiting the body of a nine-year-old child and that the mind of the same nine-year-old is inhabiting the body of the President of the United States and, unless we can do something about it, will probably represent the United States of America at the Big Four conference next week."

Torku nodded solemnly. He offered me a million dollar smile which you and I have seen a few dozen times in newspapers and magazines across the country. It was the smile which began to get me. There was only one smile like that, and it was the property

of the man in the White House.

"Miss Chalker has given us glowing reports about you," Torku said. He spoke with the voice but not the manner of a youngster. "We trust you, Spruce. I guess we have to trust you, because this thing can't be made public."

"Mr. President," Lar said, "if worse comes to worse, we could postpone the Big Four meeting."

"And lose face all over the world? Impossible, John. One way or another, we have got to return to our proper bodies in time for that meeting. Since for obvious reasons this can't be made public, our hope rests with Steve Spruce here."

"What can I do?" I said. I did not believe yet, not at that point. But I had temporarily suspended my disbelief, mostly because of the way Torku smiled. That was the first important step.

"Plenty," Lar said. "But maybe you had better tell him, Miss Chalker."

She nodded. "Listen, Steve. There's an anti-empathy pill to counteract the effects of the empathy pill. All you have to do is go to the White House and induce—"

"Or force," Torku said, almost cheerfully.

"—the alleged President of the United States and the alleged Secretary of State to take one, and each mind will return to its proper body."

"Just go to the White House," I said, "force my way into the President's room, force a pill down his throat—yeah, sure."

"Well," Torku said, "you'll have a little help. For example, although the seal of the President of the United States is not now in my possession, my signature and handwriting will be those of the President."

"Since," said Lar, "he is the President."

"That being the case," Miss Chalker said, "the President can give you a letter of introduction to someone on the White House staff. It will get you inside—"

"But once you are inside," Lar pointed out, "you'll be on your own. Because the alleged President there won't know you. He's pretty busy these days, Mr. Spruce, so perhaps things will be so confused, you'll make out all right."

"Busy?" I said. "Confused?"

"Haven't you seen the papers?" Lar asked. "Today was the President's first press conference since the, uh, switcheroo." He got a

newspaper from the night-table and brought it back to me, holding the front page up for my inspection.

The headline was PRESIDENT SUGGESTS THREE DAY SCHOOL WEEK FOR NATION'S CHILDREN. When he looked at it over my shoulder by climbing on the bed, Torku groaned. The sub-headline was EDUCATORS SHOCKED BY AUDACIOUS PROPOSAL. Other headlines told of suggestions to lower the minimum voting age to twelve, to grant drivers' licenses to ten-year-olds, to lower the draft age to fifteen and to abolish the legal distinction of minor and adult.

"It's too soon for editorial comment," Lar said. "But you can imagine what—"

"Yes," I said. I put the newspaper down. I no longer had to suspend disbelief. I could do nothing but believe. I said, "Give me the pills, Miss Chalker."

"Then you'll do it?"

I nodded. "I'll try," I said.

Miss Chalker came over and kissed me. This time it had nothing to do with fictional private eyes. Her lips were warm and moist and four-hundred-thousand years in the future. In Prixit Bobnia, they knew how to kiss.

"I," she said at last, drawing her lips about an inch away from mine, "could fall in love with a man like you." Olto came into the room and snickered, but Lar chased him out. Miss Chalker brushed her lips lightly against mine, sighed, smiled at me cozily, and stepped back.

"Here," she said, "are the pills."

I took them. Torku got a sheet of Mayflower stationery from the room desk, took out a ballpoint pen and began to write. When he finished, he handed me what he had written. I read:

This is to introduce Mr. Stephen Spruce and Miss Tara Chalker. They are to be shown every courtesy, since they are old friends of the First Lady's family. They are to be put up in the East Wing, near my own room. They are to be given the run of the White House, within the bounds of national security.

The letter was signed with the President of the United States' name. I had seen his signature once or twice before, and from what I remembered, this one looked

identical. I said, "Why both of us?"

"Don't you want me to come along?" Tara Chalker pouted.

"Yes, but—"

"It seems best this way," Lar said. "You see, Miss Chalker alone wouldn't have a chance. She is not sufficiently familiar with the mores of our time. On the other hand, Miss Chalker knows Lar and Torku, and thus knows what to expect. The two of you, working as a team—"

"All right," I said. I shook Lar's diminutive hand, and Torku's. As I left with Tara Chalker, Torku went back to his imaginary golf swings. His stroke was pretty good, but his follow-through left something to be desired.

As we left through the other room, Olto said, "You sure you don't want to see that picture now?"

Tara Chalker's face got red and she made a motion as if she wanted to swat Olto. The boy ducked out of her reach, laughing. "Maybe next time I see you," Olto said.

I took Tara Chalker's hand. We went into the hall together. She offered me a shy smile. It was a lovely smile and at any other time I would have appreciated it. Just then, though, I was thinking of a

nine-year-old boy, probably a spoiled brat like Olto if not worse, inhabiting the body of the President of the United States on the eve of the long-awaited meeting at the summit. I shuddered.

"The Secretary of State, too," Tara Chalker said.

"How the devil did you know what I was thinking?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I can read minds a little bit. It's fairly common in Pnixit Bobnia."

If I had needed any further convincing, that was it.

Our letter of introduction was addressed to Mr. Todd Sinclair, the official White House host. He scowled when he saw the Mayflower stationery, but was obviously satisfied with the President's signature. "Miss Chalker and Mr. Spruce," Todd Sinclair said. "Say, Mr. Spruce, haven't I heard of you?"

"Washington's my hometown."

"I know now. You're a private detective."

I nodded.

Sinclair frowned, but covered it quickly with a professional smile. After all, it wasn't his business who were old friends of the First Lady's family.

"Shall I let the First Lady

know you are here?" Sinclair asked.

"We would rather surprise her, if you don't mind," Miss Chalker said hastily.

Sinclair shrugged. "A member of my staff will show you to the East Wing," he said, filing the President's letter in a portfolio he was carrying. "Will you be with us long?"

"That's hard to say," I told him, and headed for the East Wing with Tara Chalker.

The guest room they gave me was larger than my bachelor apartment, all three rooms of it, in the Senatorial Arms Apartment Hotel. After introducing Tara Chalker to the enormous room next door, the houseboy returned and asked, "Will that be all, sir?"

"Is the President in the White House now?" I asked.

"Yes, but it is doubtful if anyone could see him. I understand he is in conference with the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Something about the new education law he wants to introduce in Congress next week."

A few moments later, I knocked on Tara Chalker's door. She told me to come in. She said, "It's lovely, isn't it?" I looked at her.

"It's lovely," I said.

"Have you any ideas, Steve?"

"Not yet. It seems to me our best chance will be at night, when the President is asleep. But that still leaves the Secretary."

"No. I checked on that with the houseboy. Since the meeting at the summit is only a week off—"

"At least that gives us a week," I interrupted.

"No, it doesn't. It gives us tonight only."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. Tomorrow afternoon, the President and Secretary of State are leaving for France, where they are to meet with the Prime Minister of England and the French Premier before meeting the Russian Chief of State. So, it looks like tonight or never."

"Secret Servicemen will be on duty around the clock," I said. "We can't just walk into the President's bedroom and the Secretary's and make them take the pills."

"They'll both be sleeping in this wing of the White House."

"At least that's something."

I took the pills from my pocket and gave them to Tara Chalker. "Here," I said.

"Are you quitting?"

"Don't be ridiculous. But one of us has to see about the

Secret Service and one of us has to administer the pills. Right?"

"Steve, I'm scared. You don't know Lar and Torku like I do."

"And you don't know the Secret Service," I said. "If they see us prowling around, they're liable to ask questions—afterwards."

We talked for a while and requested that dinner be brought to our rooms. We ate in gloomy silence and watched the sun go down through the south window of Tara's room. We listened to the radio and there was a lot of comment, all of it unfavorable, on the President's press conference. It was suggested that the President ought to be thinking of the meeting at the summit, anyway.

At midnight, Tara said, "Well, what do you think?"

I nodded. "Now's as good a time as any."

"Scared, Steve?"

"What the hell," I said. "In my business, if you start to show you're scared, you're all washed up."

"But are you scared?"

"Let's change the subject,"

I said. I opened the door and looked outside. The hallway was dimly lit by a night light in a wall niche twenty-five or thirty feet from the entrance

to Tara Chalker's room. I thought I heard footsteps, far away. Tara pulled the lamp-cord, which made it darker in her room than it was in the hall.

I didn't hear anything as we went outside in our bare feet, not even breathing. We both must have been holding our breaths.

The Secretary of State's guest room was two doors down from Tara's, on the other side of the hall. As we approached it, I flattened myself against the wall and pulled Tara flat alongside me. Someone was coming down the hall, walking briskly. At first I thought it was a Secret Serviceman, but the night light gleamed on his glasses and I recognized the Secretary of State—that is, Lar in the Secretary of State's body. He entered his room. I did not know if he would lock it or not. I couldn't take the chance. As the door closed, my shoulder got in the way.

"Inside," I whispered, and shoved the Secretary. We pushed in behind him. He was going to start shouting, but Tara clamped her hand over his mouth. He did a very un-Secretary of State sort of thing. He bit Tara's hand.

She stifled a yowl and let go.

I got my hand over the Secretary's mouth and snaked my other arm around his neck in a throttle hold. "Don't try it again," I said. "And don't start yelling."

I released the pressure on his throat slowly. "Aw, Miss Chalker," he said. "You're spoiling all the fun."

"The pills," I said.

Tara produced the plastic bottle. The Secretary of State took one look at it and began to squirm. I wrestled him over to the bed and straddled him there. He thrashed and writhed. His legs kicked.

"Does it dissolve?" I asked Tara.

"Yes."

"Then get a glass of water from the bathroom and put the pill in it."

A moment later, Tara leaned over the bed with a glass of water. Something was making bubbles in it. I held the Secretary's nose between my thumb and forefinger. Tara hovered there with the glass. The Secretary squirmed and twisted. "Help!" he shouted suddenly. "HELP!"

Tara sloshed the water in his mouth. He gagged and swallowed it. Outside, I heard footsteps pounding down the corridor. All at once, the Secretary shuddered and relaxed.

"Thank heaven," he said.

"Did you get to the President too?"

"Not yet," I told him. "You shouted for help. They're coming."

"On the floor!" he said, shoving us. We crouched on the floor, Tara and I. We flattened ourselves and got under the bed. Fully dressed, the Secretary of State scrambled under the covers and made it there a split second before someone pounded on the door.

"Mr. Secretary!" a voice shouted. "Mr. Secretary, are you all right?"

"What was that?" the Secretary murmured in a sleepy voice.

"Someone shouted for help. It came from your room."

"There must be some mistake," the Secretary said. "I was sound asleep."

"Sorry, sir," the voice said. The voice sounded confused. The footsteps disappeared down the hall.

"That was close," I said, getting up.

"It was easy," Tara said with a smile.

"Too easy. We haven't got the President yet."

The Secretary nodded. "But don't you see, young man, I can help you. Torku is inhabiting the President's body. If I go into him now, he'll

think I'm still Lar. He won't know what's happened. He won't suspect a thing."

"Hell," I said. "There's an easier way."

"I know what you're thinking, Mr. Spruce. But we couldn't let anyone else in the White House know what's going on. This must remain our secret. The fact that I have now been returned to my body and can establish the fact that the President and I have been possessed is of no consequence. This must remain our secret."

I shrugged.

"Then you agree? Splendid. Now, I will enter the President's room and you can follow—"

"That won't do any good," Tara groaned. "I know Torku. He's a juvenile paranoid. He'll lock the door. He always locks doors."

"I'll slip off the snap lock as I enter," the Secretary said. "I'll close the door audibly. He'll believe it is locked. Then you two enter the room, do to the President what you did to me, and everything will be all right again. Are you ready?"

I looked at Tara. Tara looked at me. The Secretary was already heading for the door.

I called him back and told him to remove his shoes. A

moment later, we all padded down the hall together. The night light behind us cast long faint shadows. There was utterly no sound. When we reached the next door down the hall, the Secretary of State motioned us back with his hand and rapped softly on the door. Tara and I stood against the wall behind him, waiting. For what seemed a long time there was nothing, then we heard the sound of someone stirring inside the room.

The President's voice called, "Well?"

"Psst, Torku," the Secretary of State said. "It's me, Lar. I want to tell you something."

"Can't it wait until morning?" the President's voice said irritably.

"No," the Secretary told him promptly. "It's about our flight to Paris. It's important."

Again a long pause, then the sound of the lock being turned. A rectangle of bright light hit the hall floor as the door was swung open into the room. The Secretary went inside. He paused for a moment and did something to the edge of the door. He shut it. Just before it closed, I heard the President say, "What are you doing prowling—"

ing around barefoot like that?"

I counted to ten, slowly. I looked at Tara Chalker. She nodded eagerly. I crossed my fingers, turned the door handle and pushed.

"What the hell is the meaning of this disturbance?" the President said in a very unchief executive voice.

"Now, Torku," the Secretary said. Then the Secretary made a mistake. He should have left the rough stuff for me, but he was eager. He clutched at the President awkwardly and the President started yelling. I sprinted toward them, but the damage was done. I got my hand over the President's mouth and grappled him to the floor. Tara fled to the bathroom and returned with a glass of bubbling water. Footsteps drummed in the hallway.

The Secretary ran to the door to lock it. I lifted the President's head. I held his nose. Tara tilted the glass—

And the door burst in. The President's face twisted away and he cried. "Seize them! Seize them all! It was an inside job. I knew it would be an inside job. It was an assassination attempt. The Secretary of State is the key man—"

He began to cough as Tara tilted the glass to his lips. Someone came and struck it from her hand. She sobbed, watching its contents spill on the rug. "You don't understand," she said. "You don't—"

But the Secretary of State said, "Please, Miss. I don't have to remind you—"

Tara lapsed into troubled silence. The room swarmed with Secret Servicemen. My right arm was twisted up behind my back. I was frisked thoroughly, but I had left my shoulder holster behind today.

"Care to identify yourselves now?" someone asked.

"I'm Tara Chalker of Pritix Bobnia," Tara said promptly.

"Let go of me," the Secretary of State said. "I won't struggle."

I looked at him. I wanted the look to say, "Maybe you ought to tell them the truth now." I guess I got my point across silently, because the Secretary frowned and shook his head.

"Spruce," I told the Secret Serviceman. "Steve Spruce."

He was a tall lad with a poker face. They were all tall lads with poker faces. "P.I.," he said. "Aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"I remember the name. You have a good reputation,

Spruce. Is this as bad as it looks?"

"It's worse," the President assured him. "You ought to take them all outside and shoot them."

The tall lad's pokerface did not change, but his voice sounded puzzled. "You're speaking figuratively, of course, Mr. President?"

The President shrugged. "Of course. They're probably fanatics opposed to my three-day school week. I know the type. Juvenophobes, I call them. You just can't trust a juvenophobe. Can you, Miss Chalker?"

"Torku, when I get you home in Pnixit Bobnia—"

"Home in Pnixit Bobnia?" one of the Secret Servicemen repeated.

The Secretary looked meaningfully at Tara. "Just a manner of speaking," she said hastily.

The Secret Serviceman behind me said, "Mr. President, exactly what did they try to do?"

"Kill me, you fool! They tried to kill me. In my sleep. That was a deadly poison the girl tried to make me swallow."

"What about it, Mr. Secretary?"

"I am sorry, but I care to

make no comment at this time."

"Another juvenophobe," the President said self-righteously.

One of the Secret Servicemen opened the door. "Come on," he said. We filed out into the hall.

"Meeting at the summit," Tara Chalker said.

The Secretary of State merely groaned.

Fifteen minutes later, Tara Chalker, the Secretary of State and I were on the rear seat of a Caddy limousine. Two Secret Servicemen sat straddling the foldaway seats, facing us. A third was driving.

"Give me the pills," I whispered to Tara.

"What are you going to do?"

"Just give them to me. If I hadn't seen Torku in the President's body, I wouldn't have tried this."

"Tried what? You can't try anything. They'll kill you."

"He's a paranoid."

"Torku? Yes. A juvenile paranoid. It's fairly common in Pnixit Bobnian culture, but it's always cleared up during adolescence."

"There's no telling what will happen if he goes to the meeting at the summit."

"But if you—"

"Give me the pills."

She did so, but one of the Secret Servicemen said, "What are you whispering about?"

"Nothing," I said. "I have a headache and asked her for aspirin. Is there a law against it?"

"Aspirin, huh? How do I know it isn't poison?"

I didn't say anything, so he asked the question again. I said, "Do I look like I want to take my own life?" That brought no comment.

"Here's the other bottle, too," Tara whispered.

"What other bottle?"

"The empathy pills themselves."

"Hey," I said. "How does it work?"

"How does what work?" the Secret Serviceman said. "If you two don't stop mumbling—"

"You merely take one and concentrate on who you want to switcheroo."

"Switcheroo?" the Secret Serviceman said. "What the hell are you talking about? I don't get it, but you better give me both of those bottles."

It suited me fine. I gave him both bottles, but first I took one of the empathy pills. I swallowed it dry. It was bitter. I stared at the Secret

Serviceman who now had the pills which could return Torku to his proper body and the President of the United States to his. Something snapped. There was a moment of pain and a moment of blackness, then I found myself sitting in the foldaway chair, staring at the Secretary of State, Tara Chalker and—Steve Spruce.

"Hey!" Spruce said. "What the hell happened?"

"Shut up, fellow," the Secret Serviceman sitting alongside me said.

I said, "Stop the car."

The car stopped. Being a Secret Serviceman had its advantages.

"What's up, Phil?" the driver wanted to know.

Phil. That was me now. "I ought to go back," I said. "You can manage without me, can't you?"

"Yeah, but why do you have to go back?"

"Maybe this isn't all of them. Maybe they'll try to reach the President again."

"We're not the only Secret Servicemen at the White House."

"I know, but I'll feel better if I go back."

"I can't explain it," the new Steve Spruce cried, "but it's some kind of trick. You see,

"I'm me!" he added in a pleading voice.

"I never would have guessed it," the driver said drily.

"You don't understand, Max. I'm me. If I'm me, how can he be me? I'm me, I tell you. Phil."

"What?" I said. "Did you call me?"

"A trick," Steve Spruce moaned.

"Well, okay, Phil," the driver told me at last. "We'll make it out without you. How will you get back?"

"Cab," I said, and practically leaped from the car. Tara Chalker blew me a kiss which no one else saw.

"But I tell you, I'm Phil," a despairing voice said as I sprinted off into the night.

I got boldly out of the cab and walked up the path to the White House gate. The guard put his flashlight on me, said "Good evening, sir," and sat down in his booth again. I became aware of an automatic, probably a .38 from the weight of it, in a shoulder holster under my left arm. I wondered if I would need it. If I did need it, I thought, we were finished. My one chance was surprise.

There was another guard at the entrance to the East

Wing. "President back asleep yet?" I said conversationally.

"I think so, Mr. Peters," the uniformed man said. He shook his head. "Can you imagine that? Who ever would have believed it? The Secretary of State, part of an assassination attempt."

"I wouldn't be too sure," I said.

"Huh? I don't get it."

"Never mind. Is there a double shift on in the East Wing?"

"No, sir. We figure there won't be more trouble now."

"Call the men out," I said. "I want a word with them."

"But it's against regulations."

"Something unusual happened tonight," I said in my best official voice. "We have to combat it with unusual methods."

He looked doubtful, but finally he flicked a few switches on a PBX phone and said, "All ops to guard check-point. All ops to guard check-point. This is urgent." He looked at me very unhappily. "I hope it's urgent," he said.

"I can't tell you how urgent it is."

"Shall we awaken the President?"

"No," I said, "but you might give me the master key."

He took off his cap, scratched his head, and handed me a key. "You're taking full responsibility, you know," he said.

I smiled cheerfully. "That's what I'm here for."

Presently half a dozen plainclothesmen appeared at the check-point. They all waited respectfully, one or two of them smiling at me. Apparently Phil Peters ranked high on the White House Secret staff. I was lucky—so far.

"Men," I said, "we have a chance to catch the leader of the assassins tonight, if we play it right."

"You mean," one of them said, "the Secretary of State wasn't—?"

I shook my head. "He's coming in this way, in all probability. Don't stop him. Don't be on guard inside. He's cautious. He—"

"You're setting a trap for him?"

"Yes," I said. "I'll be waiting for him inside."

"I don't know what the President would think," a man on my left said.

"Stop worrying. I already checked it with him by phone."

"Did you?" the uniformed guard asked me.

"Of course."

He brought his hand down sharply on the top of the PBX. "That's a lie," he said triumphantly. "I thought something fishy was going on. Any phone call to the President's room would have had to come through this PBX. You didn't call him."

"You're positive?" one of the men asked the guard.

"Absolutely positive."

They crowded around me. "Phil," one of them said, "maybe you'd better come down to headquarters with us."

"Men," I said, "you don't understand. You don't—"

Their eyes told me it didn't matter whether they understood or not. I sighed and whipped out the automatic. I was right: it was a .38 special.

"Keep back, I said, "all of you. Get in there." I motioned them toward the guard's PBX cage. They all crowded in. There was barely room. I reached in and yanked a handful of wires loose from the PBX board. I slammed the heavy metal gate and locked it.

"You'll never get away with this," the guard told me.

I turned the corner of the corridor before one of them could get to his gun. I started running. It wouldn't take

them long to break out of the PBX cage. It would take them practically no time at all.

There was shouting behind me, and the sound of metal striking metal. I pounded down the corridor toward the President's bedroom. All at once, I heard the flimsy gate crash.

I reached the President's door. I fumbled with the key, inserted it. The President of the United States was standing on the other side of the door when I opened it. He was holding a gun, too. He was pointing it at me. I couldn't shoot him, and I think he knew it.

"Drop it," he said.

I dropped it. But I kicked the door shut behind me and locked it. I could hear footsteps in the corridor now. "Listen, Torku," I said. "You can't get away with this. You can't. Why don't you read about the meeting at the summit like other boys in Pnixit Bobnia? Why do you have to go there and—"

"To change history!" he said in a childish voice. "Me, Torku. To change history. You just wait and see!"

I sighed and flung myself at him. The gun went off a few inches from my face, deafening me. Something

pounded on the door from the other side. The President clubbed my face with his forearm and clutched at me, dragging me to the floor. We rolled over and over. He was surprisingly strong, a combination of muscles kept in shape with plenty of golf and Torku's juvenile paranoia. I broke free and clobbered his jaw with my left fist. He kicked me where it hurts the most and jumped on top of me and began to bang my head against the floor. The room went around and around. The door was shaking with each blow that hit it.

I got my hands under the President's arms and heaved. He crashed against the door and slumped to the floor there. He began to get up, but I didn't wait for him. I streaked into the bathroom for a glass of water. I filled it and dropped the pill in and rushed back into the bedroom.

The President swung at me with a wild looping right. I ducked and it barely grazed the top of my head. The water was bubbling and some of it sloshed out of the glass as I forced the President against the wall and pinned him there with all the weight of my body behind my hip. He tried to bite my hand as I

reached for his nose. He cursed.

The door rocked and trembled.

I made him drink most of it. He coughed and swallowed and then the door crashed into the room.

"Mr. President!" someone shouted.

Hands grabbed me. The President gagged and looked at us with tearful eyes. "Kill this man!" he cried.

They gathered around me. Someone put a pair of handcuffs on my wrists.

And the President began to laugh.

"All right, men," he said. "You may let him go."

"Leave him go!" a few of them gasped in unison.

"That's an order," the President said. The handcuffs were removed. "You're Spruce, aren't you?" the President whispered.

"Yeah."

"That's what I figured. Good work, Spruce."

"Mr. President," someone said. "This man tried to—"

"Nothing of the sort," the President said. "I'll explain everything later. Leave me alone with him, please."

They all got out of there. Doubtfully. I have never seen such doubtful faces.

"Spruce," said the Presi-

dent of the United States, "let me offer you my congratulations. I take it you switched bodies with this Secret Serviceman, and—"

"Save the kudos, sir," I said. "We're still in hot water. They have Miss Chalker and the Secretary of State downtown. They're being held on an assassination attempt. And me. Or that is, my body."

"We'll figure something out," the President said. He smiled. It was a wonderful smile because now there was nothing of Torku in it. "I know, Spruce. This was the eve of the Big Four meeting. Important. Vital. We thought it would be a splendid time for a security test. Only the Secretary and a few trusted people were in on it, you understand. The Secretary and a private detective, an outside man who co-operated for verisimilitude."

"What about the real Phil Peters?" I said.

"We'll work it out with Peters. We'll work the whole thing out. We'll tell the Secret Service it was a test and they passed it with flying colors. They captured you, didn't they?"

"Yes, sir!"

"See what I mean?"

I saw, and it all worked out the way the President said it

would. The next afternoon, he and the Secretary of State left on schedule for Europe. The papers ran a long story about the successful security test, and everyone was happy. Except Phil Peters. He never did understand, but he received a personal executive order to forget what had happened, and after I took one of the anti-empathy pills and returned to my own body, Peters returned to his.

Tara Chalker has taken her class back to Pnixit Bobnia,

but I'm scared. Real scared.

Because Olto showed me the picture in his history book before he left for the future. It's in a flattering chapter about private detectives in the Twentieth Century. The picture worries me.

But the picture has me worried.

Tara Chalker will be back. Pictures—at least pictures like this—don't lie.

The picture Olto showed me is one of Tara Chalker.

With a groom. Me. **THE END**

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G. E. CARNEY,

(Signature of Business Manager)

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Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1955.

VICTOR C. STABLE.

Notary Public, State of New York, No. 24-3800350, Qualified in Kings County. Certificate filed in New York County. Commission Expires March 30, 1957.



PASSING FANCY

By HARRY L. SONNEBORN

The young man had psychiatrist-type problems. So he went to one. And a good one, too. This mind doctor's motto was: "If you can't cure 'em—join 'em."

TELL me about it," said the psychiatrist.

The thin chap ran thin fingers through thin hair. He looked worried, as thin chaps seem always to do.

"Well," he began, "I was driving to work this morning as usual. Coming right down State Street, just the same as usual, when I came up behind a police car at 47th."

The psychiatrist made a large black "47" on his pad

and began to embellish it with curlicues.

"The police car was going real slow, so I passed him very carefully, going twenty-five, and after I got past a couple of blocks I looked in the rear view. He wasn't there, so I speeded up a little. I just figured he had turned off."

"Let me get that," said the psychiatrist, drawing a police car with smoke coming out of the exhaust. The thin chap

thought he was taking notes and waited respectfully until the pencil stopped.

"There isn't much traffic on State," he went on, "so I did not pass anybody else till about 35th." The psychiatrist made a classical XXXV on his pad. "This time it was a bus. I followed him a ways and then he pulled in at a corner to pick up somebody and I swung around him. I still wasn't thinking much about it till I happened to glance in the rear view. He wasn't there."

"Turned off?" asked the psychiatrist, sketching a large question mark and filling it with cross-hatching.

"It could be," said the thin chap, "but the bus doesn't turn off State, unless they changed the route."

"Then where do you think it went?"

The thin chap tried to shrug his shoulders, but he was sitting hunched up like he was cold, and it didn't quite work. "How should I know? All I know is it wasn't there and it should have been."

"Well, my dear fellow . . ."

"There's one more," interrupted the thin chap. "You know that stretch of State between 12th and Park? It's one

long block of factories, all fenced, without a cross street or even a driveway. I caught up with a car there and I knew I could find out whether—whether—"

"Whether you were seeing things."

"Yes. This car was light blue, a new Chevvy, and there were two women in it. I took a good look and then went around them. I looked at them as I went past and they looked at me. Then I cut over in front and looked in the rear view. Nobody there."

"What did you do?"

"I stopped the car and got out as quick as I could and looked around. There wasn't a soul around. Pretty soon a couple of other cars came along, but no blue Chevvy. I got back in the car and drove to a drug store, called up our family doctor and got your name, and came here. Doc probably thinks I'm nuts."

"Anything happen on the way here?"

"I don't know," said the thin chap. "I turned the rear view around where I couldn't see in it even by accident." He shivered.

The psychiatrist wrote a large "NUTS" on his pad, drew a heart around it, and began to adorn it with lacy frills.

"Your symptoms," he said, "are not very unusual, nor are they necessarily an indication of anything very serious. You must understand that some of the things that happened this morning were the products of your own imagination. For instance, the police car. When you first saw it, or thought you saw it, it was in your mind as an idea labeled 'Police Car.' Then you didn't see it. That idea is labeled 'Not-Police-Car.' How do you know which idea is true?"

"I guess I don't," said the thin chap morosely.

"Similarly, we have the opposing ideas of 'Bus' and 'Not-Bus,' and 'Chevvy' and 'Not-Chevvy.' Do you follow me?"

"Sort of," said the thin chap. "But what I want to know is: Were they there, or weren't they?"

"My dear fellow! That isn't the point at all! You were making a subconscious choice between two contradictory ideas, that's all. Now we must determine what motivated your choice. The truth lies in your subconscious, I can assure you." He carefully drew an elaborate frame around his doodles, looked at the page critically, and dropped it in a drawer with a hundred oth-

ers like it. "Now to get at that truth. I want you to come in and relax on the couch in the other room, and tell me a few things. You just relax and talk freely and everything will clear up. Everything." He smiled.

"You mean I'll know whether a bus is a bus or a 'Not-Bus'?"

"Of course!" The psychiatrist beamed. "Everything will clear up! Everything will clear up!" He held open the door into the other room.

The thin chap went past him, through the door into the other room.

Went past him.

The psychiatrist blinked suddenly at a black sedan bearing the word "Police." Behind it was a large bus. He was on a street corner. The sign said State and—oh, no!—"XXXV Street." There came a light blue Chevvy with two women in it. He fainted.

The thin chap stepped into the room with the leather couch. He turned to ask whether—but there was no one there. He looked around, and called, but there was no one anywhere in the office.

Well, it was all very simple, he decided. He must have been talking to a Not-Psychiatrist.

Everything *had* cleared up.

THE END

Part two of ...

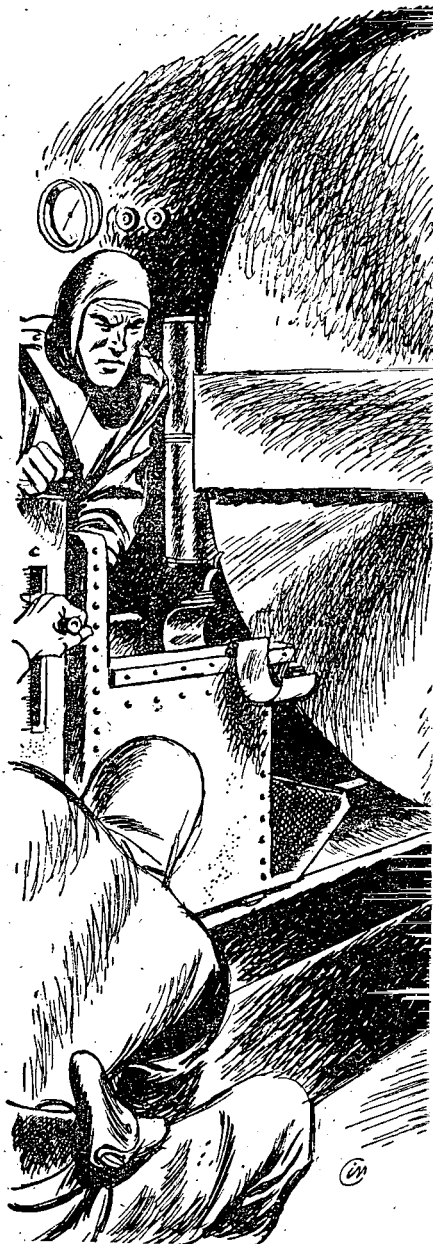
THE SCARLET SAINT

By MANLY BANISTER

SYNOPSIS OF PART I

The time is far, far in the future. The entire universe is held under the influence of an invisible, mysterious, alien entity known as the TRISZ. What it—or they—is, from whence it came, where its present home planet, if any, lies—none of these facts is known. The Trisz operates through renegade denizens of every planet—renegades who have not the slightest knowledge of their master. And slowly the universe is dying under the gradual suctioning-off of its energy by the Trisz.

On Rth (Earth), however, a secret group of Rthmen has slowly through the ages formed the nu-





Once within the chamber he would be reduced to dust!

cleus of a plan toward eventual revolution—a revolt aimed at total destruction of the Trisz. The group has taken on the protective coloration of a religious cult devoted to the worship of the Sun. The Trisz regards the cult favorably, since it preaches conformity with the established order—and also because the Trisz claims to be able to know every thought that passes through the minds of the peoples it holds in bondage, and it has “detected” no hint of the cult’s true purpose.

Priests for the Sun Religion must first graduate from the Institute of Manhood—an academy where mental and physical exercises are so rigorous few candidates survive. Those who manage to complete the courses become Blue Brothers: priests of the Sun Religion. Those who show exceptional powers and abilities become Scarlet Saints—a title corresponding to that of Cardinal.

Throughout the ages during which the plan for revolt has been forming, the heads of the cult have awaited the day a truly exceptional man will come out of the Institute of Manhood. KOR DANAY, young, handsome, incredibly gifted with physical prowess, with a mind far beyond that of any other known human, appears to be the answer to their prayer. Carefully he is tested as to his fitness to trigger the revolution; should he be chosen, and fail, there would be no second chance—and all life in the universe perish.

And so Kor Danay, knowing little of his true destiny, steps from the Institute into a post as Scarlet Saint of a Holy See embracing the central section of what once was the United States, with his headquarters at Ka-si (Kansas City). He has been warned by TOR SHAN,

Master of the Institute, that the Trisz possess the Extrapolater—a vast cybernetic machine which constantly processes a stream of sociological data concerning Rth’s populace, thereby forecasting with amazing accuracy the future trend of events. Already, warns Tor Shan, the Extrapolater has informed the Trisz that Kor Danay can be dangerous—which means the Trisz will attempt to trap him into revealing his purpose. Should the trap be successfully sprung, Kor Danay would perish and with him all hope for the defeat of the Trisz.

On his way to Ka-si to take over his duties as Scarlet Saint for the district, Kor Danay saves his life only by means of his extraordinary powers. And once there, he meets SET HOR-AN, a Blue Brother of the district, whom Kor Danay instantly distrusts. Before Kor can take over as spiritual leader of the district, however, he must submit to a thorough questioning by the local agent for the Trisz. This ordeal he manages to pass through successfully, and is now ready to take up his ordained duties—and to begin plotting the eventual annihilation of the hated Trisz.

Now go on with the story . . .

CHAPTER VII

BBLUE BROTHER Set Hor-AN folded his pudgy hands. The saintliness of his demeanor was enhanced by a cherubic smile that played across his round features.

“My dear,” said he, with a tone of finality. “It has to be that way, don’t you see? However far the game must be

played, it simply has got to be played as we are playing it. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it."

The young woman seated opposite him bit her full underlip. She was lovely, a woman of the desert People. Her hair was a deep chestnut, arranged about her face in the popular style then fashionable among the well-to-do. She set firm, red lips and almost glared at the Blue Brother with eyes of deep sea-green.

"I tell you it is a dangerous game we are playing, Brother Set. Suppose something should go wrong? You know what Tor Shan has said, don't you?"

Brother Set's amiable features lost none of their look of cherubic cheer.

"Certainly it's dangerous, but he has gotten this far, hasn't he? You know as well as I that a Saint has to live dangerously—even this one. Tor Shan is of the opinion that our lad is of particular importance to the plans of the Men. Well, that remains to be seen, of course. I'm working under double orders, you know."

"You mean—"

"Of course I mean! According to Tor Shan's thinking we must lose no more time than necessary in getting this

particular Man to the Organization. And I have orders from the Trisz, relayed through the City Council of Triszmen, to lose no time framing him with a good, solid charge that will merit a public execution. Do you think it has been easy for me, Lady Soma?"

The Lady Soma held a handkerchief against her lips.

"That is what I mean about its being dangerous. We both run a grave risk of being killed—if not by the Trisz, then by *him*."

Brother Set toyed a moment with a stylus, tapping the blunt end against his teeth, his expression thoughtful.

"Well," he sighed at last, putting the stylus down. "It would be no more than I expected when I first undertook this hide-and-seek game years ago." He smiled, "Though I will say, my dear Lady Soma, that you are entirely too lovely and young to die!"

"Thank you," she replied coolly. "At least, you have given me the well known skin of the teeth to escape by!"

"Thank the Lord Sun for that much," chuckled the rotund Blue Brother. "But you neglect to take our Saint himself into consideration." He sighed and shook his head sadly. "I wish I had the brains

—or whatever it takes—to be chosen for Manhood! As it is . . . well, I have been fortunate, my dear. You see me now, an eldery priest of the Blue Order, raised to the honor of doing a job worthy of a Man—” He grimaced—“without the satisfaction of knowing, when I die, that I could have smeared the lot of them if it weren’t for my confounded Oath!”

“Brother Set!”

“Ho! I know—envy does not become a Brother of the cloth. But just the same, my dear, I know a few of the things a Man can do. (I am more fortunate in that respect than most of my Blue Brethren), and if I had their powers at my disposal, I’d do a little house cleaning of my own!” He chuckled shortly. “The Masters most likely took cognizance of this temperamental attitude of mine, which explains why I was relegated to this.” He shook the hem of his blue robe.

“I’m proud, though, to be able to help the Men. But it worries me, this playing both ends against the middle—especially when *I’m* in the middle!”

The girl laid her hand softly upon his.

“We are most fortunate you

did *not* become a Saint, Brother Set! Who could have served half so well as you?”

He leaned back in his plastic comfort chair, beaming with angelic pleasure.

“You say the nicest things, my dear!” He glanced at a chronometer on the wall and started up. “Good Lord! It’s after half-morning! They’ll be here any minute! Are you sure now, that you have everything in mind? We can’t slip on this, or—” He passed a rigid forefinger significantly across his throat.

“If I only knew *how* he could get out of it!”

“I told you what he did in the first two attempts that were made on his life. Remember what he did to those two Trizman Thugs. Picked one up and threw him at the other! Ho, ho! The woman told us about that; the men wouldn’t! And that murderer-for-hire—know where he is now? Out preaching to his flock on street corners! Resourceful, our Man! Lives up to the highest tradition of his Sainthood—and you can’t say I didn’t know he would!”

The Lady Soma patted his hand again.

“I know. You wouldn’t have sent those men against him to be killed. You knew he’d spare them.”

"That's what I mean about being a Man," Brother Set interjected. "For all I'm supposed to be a priest, I've got something of the Devil in me, too. I'd have torn 'em apart!"

"Silly!" Soma laughed with clear, tinkling merriment. "You'd have done nothing of the kind!"

Brother Set grinned and winked.

"And now maybe you feel better about the plan, eh?"

She started to frown, then smiled quickly at his droll expression.

"I guess I am mostly thinking of it from my own viewpoint." She shuddered. "I'd hate to have anybody put *me* in that position."

"Nobody shall. Now pull yourself together. I think I hear them coming."

An acolyte, newly graduated into the ranks of Blue Brotherhood, preceded Kor and Brother Pol into the room.

Kor paused on the threshold, suddenly alert. Brother Set's round features and saintly smile matched perfectly the image purloined from the mind of the assassin. Kor's second thought as he advanced warily into the room was a startled impression of sheer loveliness as he caught sight of Lady Soma.

Brother Pol quickly made introduction between the Blue Brother Set and Kōr in accordance with ecclesiastical protocol. This was carried over by Brother Set to include Lady Soma.

"—daughter of Lord Roen Gol, esteemed resident Lord of our own Ka-si district, civil functionary, protector of the People, etc., etc. You know what I mean?"

The ice was quite thoroughly broken from the beginning. Kor took special delight in the conversation that followed the departure of Brother Pol, in which Lady Soma was an interested participant.

She finally took her leave, and Kor found himself alone with the Blue Brother whom he had cause to distrust most heartily.

Now that he was settled in the quarters occupied by his predecessor, a certain Sir Ten Roga, Kor had set this conference with Brother Set to discuss the affairs of the diocese. While he was much concerned to learn what had happened to Sir Ten, he felt that he had reason not to let this concern become too apparent.

Kor found many things to surprise him—for one, the population of the Ka-si region. He had not thought the

desert would support so many. Brother Set began to explain matters of service personnel, who were drawn from the desert dwellers.

"The Civil Service examinations are constantly open, calling for volunteers to become Triszmen in one capacity or another. We have a rather heavy drain on volunteers from this region. Since few are required in Ka-si itself, many are sent to other parts of the world, as need requires. Some, of course, are called for training as spacemen to man the Trisz vessels. And then, of course, there are the colonies."

"The colonies, Brother?"

"You have not heard of the colonies, Sir? According to information, there are many worlds throughout the galaxy, each capable of supporting a large population. These worlds are only slightly, or not at all, populated. The Trisz, therefore, are introducing Rth People to these foreign worlds . . . colonizing them, as it were, for the better future of mankind and the galaxy as a whole. The Trisz are a most kind and benevolent race, Sir."

"Yes—yes, of course," Kor interposed. He remembered now a lecture on this subject at the Institute. What had

been the point? Certain of the People were selected from time to time for these colonizing ventures, and whisked mysteriously off into space. In their desire to attain a future liaison with these colonized worlds of People, the Men had attempted to discover where they had been taken, but the search so far had not met with success. This lack of success was attributed to the small effort that could be expended in that direction, but the Men hoped some day to locate the colonies and reunite them with the parent People of Rth when the Universe should some day come under the reign of the Men. Star-combing was a vast undertaking, and in view of the limited number of Men available, it might take another thousand years to locate these lost colonies—unless access might be had to the records of the Trisz. There was always hope.

Kor hazarded a question.

"Are the colonists sent to any particular System in this or any other particular galaxy?"

Brother Set shrugged and smiled his saintly smile.

"Who knows where they go, Sir Kor? That is the business of the benevolent Trisz, who seek always the welfare of the

People. Getting to the point, Sir, we are furnishing a quota of five hundred colonists very soon. Only a few more volunteers need to be signed up."

"What happens if you fall short in your quota?"

Brother Set raised startled eyebrows, as if the question were unheard of.

"Sir, we *never* fall short!"

"I see." Kor ground his teeth together and wished mightily he dared probe just once behind that saintly mask.

"Brother Set, what happened to the Scarlet Saint whose See I am taking over?"

Brother Set looked sad. He did feel genuinely sad about it—Sir Ten had been a regular fellow to work with—but he had to continue playing with the young man across from him.

He said, "The Lord Sun took him Home."

Kor growled under his breath. This gibberish was good enough to spread before the Trisz, but he, Kor, was a Man! He controlled himself with an effort.

"How was he taken, Brother?"

"Sir Ten Roga loved to ride horseback on the desert. He went one day alone—and vanished."

That was possible, Kor

thought, but not probable. Being a Man, Sir Ten could easily have vanished off the face of the Rth; but also, being a Man, he could not have done so without permission of the Institute . . . and the Institute would never have permitted it.

"Did you not find his body, Brother?"

"Yes—that is, I think we did. We found his horse's body, and a few fragments of our Saint's robe and buskins. The horse had stumbled in a hole and broken its leg. Obviously, Sir Ten was thrown and either killed outright, or injured and made easy prey for the desert wolves."

Kor was satisfied. Now he knew that Brother Set was a liar and deceiver. No living thing could kill a Man in any way whatsoever without his permission. Sir Ten would instantaneously have compensated for such a fall and been unharmed.

Kor said, "The Trisz murdered Sir Ten!"

Brother Set pursed his lips, shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands expressively.

It was desired that Kor should think so. The Lady Soma thought so also. Only Brother Set knew that Sir Ten had been recalled to the Organization of Men—the

underground branch of the Brotherhood — especially to make a place for Kor in this particular See.

Kor's first Chapel day in his new post made him nervous. There was so much to do, so much to attend to. In spite of his training, he was new to it all. Acolytes flew hither and yon in response to Brother Set's directions. Kor paced his study, preparing himself for his planned address.

A mumbling uproar from outside percolated through the train of his thought and roughened the edge of the fine prose he was constructing. He threw back his shoulders in annoyance and went swiftly into the outer Chapel in search of the Blue Brother.

"Are the People gathering already for the meeting? It lacks still an hour."

The Brother beamed his saintly smile.

"Some idiot out there is making a fuss about being saved. He has quite a crowd around him, preaching from the Chapel steps."

"I should like to hear him," Kor said. "It is possible, Brother, that we might learn something from the simple religious expression of the People."

"I doubt it," Brother Set muttered.

He turned back to his interrupted task at the altar. Obviously, Kor thought, the ecstasy of a saved soul bored this good priest.

Kor went to the Chapel door and opened it a crack. A small, shabbily dressed Person stood on the steps a few feet below him, exhorting a sizeable crowd of laborers, merchants, housewives, Triszmén, and a few girls. The man's voice was high-pitched, filled with fervor and ecstasy.

"—and I would not be here now," he cried, "if I had not seen with my own eyes the glory of which I speak! No! I was an atheist, I say. But as I entered that room, a criminal, the Lord Sun himself appeared unto me, and spoke, saying . . ."

The crowd rumbled.

"Proof, fellow! Give us proof!"

"You ask for proof! Very well. I will give you the proof. He gave unto me!"

There was a moment of breath-catching silence. The man on the steps drew himself erect. It was a stirring sight. Every eye centered on that slight figure above the crowd, every mind attuned to the mystery of salvation.

As the silence prolonged

itself into a hush, the speaker slowly raised clasped hands over his head, and Kor started. Into the astounded eyes of the crowd lanced a brilliant gleam of brightly raying luminescence.

"Putting on a show, is he?" Brother Set asked at Kor's elbow.

Kor gestured to the crack of the door.

"See for yourself."

Brother Set looked.

"Well, well. Very interesting!"

"Do you think it a genuine miracle?" Kor asked, making a great effort toward restraining a smile.

"I am a religious man," replied the Brother, "and I feel that all things are possible to the Lord Sun. But sometimes I wonder about these tatter-tail prophets and the gimmicks they bring in from the desert."

"You don't believe him, I take it?"

Brother Set smiled openly and disarmingly, much like a cherub.

"Frankly, no." He cast Kor one of his droll looks. "Do you?"

As Kor hesitated, he added, "You needn't answer that, Sir!" and went quickly back to directing the altar arrangement.

CHAPTER VIII

KOR'S attempt to extrapolate forthcoming events was a dismal failure. He thought that perhaps his divisible mind, an advantage in some ways, now was proving itself a hindrance. Ordinarily, he should have been able to procure a pretty clear picture of events for a period a full day ahead. Beyond that, he should have been able to make a rational prediction with reasonable certitude of exactness for a period much farther in advance.

Instead, the reward of his effort was simply a continued feeling of restless unease, an apprehension on the non-verbal level of menace that lurked in the offing.

About mid-morning, a letter came for Kor, delivered by a lackey from the staff of Lord Roen Gol, routed through Brother Set, and conducted upon a silver salver by a blue-robed acolyte into Kor's study.

Kor broke the seal, unfolded the paper, and scanned the message with pleasure, noting the neat, feminine script, followed by the signature of Lady Soma Gol. Kor read it again, not because his glance had missed anything, but to let his eyes linger like a caress

upon this token of her hand. The loops and whorls of her writing acted as a tonic to his feelings, and Kor glowed with a fine sense of well-being.

He tried to appear casual as he strolled out and accosted Brother Set.

"I have just received some sort of an invitation—from the young lady who was here the other day. What's her name?"

Brother Set arched his eyebrows. "It is an odd thing for a Saint to have a faulty memory, Sir. You doubtless refer to the Lady Soma, daughter of Lord Roen Gol . . ."

Kor snapped his fingers.

"Yes — yes! Lady Soma. This invitation, it appears, is to some kind of formal reception. Don't you think it will be a distressing sort of affair?"

The Blue Brother frowned and wagged his head.

"On the contrary, Sir! It is customary for the district Lord to receive the new Man into his see, and distinctly an honor."

The rotund priest donned his most cherubic smile, but Kor noticed that there was no humor about his eyes. He thought, this could be a trap. A mental picture of the Lady Soma swam in his mind, and he shook his head. *She* could

not be connected with the nefarious activities of this scoundrelly priest.

He said, "Perhaps I had better go."

"I rather guess you had!" laughed the Blue Brother. "You wouldn't want to anger our local Lord would you? Not to mention his lovely daughter!"

"The invitation is from the Lady Soma, not Lord Roen Gol," Kor put in.

"So the Lady Soma is her father's secretary. What is strange about that? Naturally, she takes care of the details of her father's social affairs. And it will be an affair, you can count on that."

Kor had known the girl acted only for her father, but he had rather believed otherwise. The fact took away the delightful feeling of intimacy he had experienced reading the invitation. He felt like going away somewhere and counting the electrons in his viscera to make sure they were all there.

"Very well, Brother Set. I will go."

"Of course you will. Arrangements have already been made."

"You mean to say you read that note before I did?"

"Certainly. A letter of ac-

ceptance has already been dispatched to her ladyship."

"The letter was sealed," Kor pressed stubbornly, feeling a slow rise of anger.

"So it was sealed! I can unseal and seal a letter as well as the next. Officially, I am your secretary, and it is my duty—"

"Enough!" Kor snapped at him. "Do you forget who I am?"

"Pardon, your Eminence," apologized Brother Set, injecting a tone of irony into the ancient and seldom-used title. "We will touch upon the matter later. Right now, we must concern ourselves with the matter of the five hundred colonists. They are embarking today, and you and I will have to be on hand at the spaceport this afternoon to take care of a few last minute matters."

"What kind of matters?"

"For one, you will be expected to speak to the colonists."

"What am I supposed to say?"

"The usual things. Bon voyage—carry on the traditions of Rth—invoke the protection of the Lord Sun. The usual rigmarole."

"I don't," Kor said coldly, "think I like the ill-concealed levity with which you treat

matters of this nature, Brother Set!"

While Kor busied himself over an address to be delivered to the departing colonists, Brother Set took advantage of the Scarlet Saint's absorption to mount a carriage and make a hasty side-trip to the residence of Lord Roen Gol, where he closeted himself with his Lordship and the Lady Soma. At the conclusion of their brief interview, the three shook hands solemnly around.

"Neither of you will have a moment to lose," the Blue Brother warned. "Lord Roen, sir, are you sure all is in readiness?"

The Lord, a tall, bluff man with iron-gray hair and piercing, inquisitive eyes, nodded shortly.

"The fastest horses in my stable have been made ready, Brother. When the time comes, I shall act without a moment's hesitation."

"You realize that it means losing everything?"

Lord Roen Gol looked around him, as if piercing the walls with his sight and appraising the length and breadth of his holdings. He shrugged, and a slight smile tinged his stern lips.

"What is it to lose every-

thing—when everything is as nothing compared to the greater goal?" He stroked his daughter's hair fondly. "So long as I do not lose my dearest possession . . ."

The Lady Soma smiled quickly up at him, green eyes alight.

"You know I can take care of myself, Father! And I will see you again—afterward."

Brother Set laid a finger against his lips.

"Tut! Let us not dwell on the unpleasant aspects. Now, I must hurry back and whip my boy some more." The Blue Brother chuckled at Soma's suddenly startled look. "Must keep him on the qui vive, you know. It would never do to let him become complacent. My whip, of course, is only metaphorical, but I have been laying it on heavily." He looked momentarily unhappy. "Perhaps too heavily—but no. It is essential that he thoroughly dislike and mistrust me. He must depend entirely on himself. Well, tonight's the affair, and I can keep him busy this afternoon. After that, it's up to you two—we may not meet again."

He turned suddenly and put his back to them. His voice came muffled over his shoulder:

"Maybe I'll get used to

carrying on alone, but I doubt it."

The Trisz spaceport was located within the tallest and broadest of the buildings within the city. From their cradles deep within the monstrous edifice, the magnetically operated space ships of the Trisz took off for far worlds; and as quickly as they were gone, the cradles received those coming in from the depths of space.

Mostly, these were supply vessels that kept linked the worlds under the domination of the Trisz. A very little space travel was permitted, but not enough to constitute a tourist condition. Men of business and trade occasionally traveled to other worlds, and rarely, extra-terrestrials arrived at one city or another on Rth to observe methods, look after legal or financial interests, and so forth. Mass travel was prohibited by the Trisz, in keeping with their policy of division among their subjects.

Kor had once or twice amused himself watching the ovoid vessels rise from the spaceport and waft gently upward toward the stratosphere. Once in space, of course, the vessels lanced into light-year-devouring over-

drive; but at top speed, their pace was a snail's crawl compared to the almost instantaneous maneuverability of the Men.

Kor had wished to observe these vessels close at hand, and he was disappointed to find that he must speak to the colonists many floors below the spaceport levels, where the entire group was contained in a great hall. As Kor spoke, his voice was carried to the farthest reaches of the hall by spaced amplifiers.

He searched the crowd casually with his glance, wondering what type of People these were who willingly abandoned their homes and their world to embark into the unknown. Mostly, they were rough Outlanders, shabbily dressed and ill fed. Life was hard and poor in the Outlands. On the other hand, some appeared to be devil-may-care young blades, obviously of wealth and background, enlisting for the promise of adventure, tired already in their young lives of an existence grown stale on Rth. The crowd was about evenly divided between the sexes, and not all of the women were young. Apparently age did not constitute a matter of preference.

A blinding ball of light

waxed in a far corner of the hall as Kor concluded the formalities. He got down quickly from the speaking platform and sought out Brother Set, who was talking over lading details with a section of the Triszman guard.

"You remember the convert with the glowing hands, Brother? He is in this crowd."

Brother Set smiled angelically.

"Indeed, Sir? Apparently the Lord Sun has work for him on other worlds."

"It is strange . . ." Kor began.

"What is strange about it? There is room in the colonies for the godly, as well as the ungodly!"

Kor hesitated and bit his lip. He recalled the interest the Trisz had taken in the man with the glowing hands. Had the fellow willingly volunteered for this mission? Or had other methods been resorted to? Kor did not know, but he could guess that the man's presence had made the Trisz nervous . . . was it his obvious connection with Kor? Kor would have liked to speak with him; but it was already too late. The crowd surged toward the elevators for the swift upward journey to the spaceport.

"Shall we go?" Brother Set

murmured beside him. "There are so many bodies here—and so few of them wash."

Kor decided to walk to Lord Roen Gol's reception that evening. He told himself that this was the safest course. If that villainous priest intended to have him ambushed on the way, he was safer selecting his own way and not entrusting himself to a carriage-driver obviously under the Blue Brother.

Brother Set protested this arrangement.

"I can take care of myself," Kor observed pointedly.

Brother Set shrugged and sighed.

"It is not propriety, Sir, that our Saints gallivant the streets alone by night. Which route do you take?"

"As the Lord Sun directs," retorted Kor, filching a leaf from Brother Set's own book. "As I am a Man, my way is my own. Good evening, Brother Set."

Lord Roen Gol's imposing residence lay at the northward edge of town, a distance of over a mile from the Scarlet Chapel. The Sun had barely set when Kor started out, and the western sky was a cauldron of seething scarlet; banded bright pink and streaming with wretched

green. Sand clouds high in the atmosphere were responsible for the colors, both by refraction and reflection. Mirages, too, were common in the desert air, and fantastic lights were often seen to play far up above the surface for the space of an hour or so after sunset.

Kor strode along, past lamp-lit windows and open doors that exhaled a breath of the day's heat, drawn out by the encroaching chill of night. The air was odorous, baited with cooking smells and the sour stink of synthetic beer, vibrant with a continuous vociferation and clack of conversation.

It was amazing, Kor thought, in how short a time he had become accustomed to the sights and clamor of the world. His years at the Institute had faded into the background of his consciousness, and seemed now scarcely ever to have been. In those years, the People had been nothing to him save statistics in a book—a meaningless dream for which he had been supposed to exist, a noble concept that he had failed to visualize in symbols of flesh and blood.

Now he had seen the People at their everyday life, and it occurred to him that there

was less difference than he had thought between the Men and the People. It was borne in upon him as in no other way it could have been, that they were of common stock, he and these People of Rth, firmly bound by their relationship of mutual humanity.

True, the Men were superior to the People. But no longer in the connotation he had formerly cherished. The Men were people of a different order, trained to bring out their latent capabilities, given direction and set upon a lasting purpose in life. The People lacked both direction and purpose. They simply existed, quarreling, fighting, loving, being gay and sad by turns, being completely human.

It had been Kor's own good fortune that he was descended of a long line of Men. He thought of Jon Moran, and experienced a tug at his heart. Poor Jon had been—next to Kor himself—the most promising of the graduate Men. Jon had been born among the People. He had seen only one Scarlet Saint in all his life before entering the Institute. It was the sight of that noble Man in the scarlet cloak that had infused into the boy a desire to emulate. And his parents had entered him—for

death on a distant, dismal planetoid!

Kor had not seen his own father since that day he himself had entered the Institute. Kor's father had died nobly somewhere on a forgotten world—and Kor kept the story of that sacrificial death enshrined in his heart. It was one of those inexplicable and ever-recurring dramas of space, where strange forces had seized a group of explorers, and one, through his sacrifice, had enabled the others to survive. That one was Kor's father.

An elation of pride lifted Kor as he swung along. His grandfather, his father, his friend Jon. He seemed to feel their ghostly presence in the penetrating chill of the early night. He was proud of them all, proud of the Men, and prouder still of his own place in the scheme of things. Kor's whole world was one of consuming pride. It was with a lofty pity that he gazed down now from his Pelion-piled-upon Ossa of pride and viewed the raggle and the baggle of No-ka-si—its merchants, its householders, its women, its wives—and its girls.

He and they were one, all right, but below the level of mind. There was a sharp dividing line there. It was the

mind that made the Man—which signalized him and divorced him completely from the People. It helped Kor's sense of self-esteem as he went along to have the People fall respectfully from his path, and to swoop in behind him to touch or kiss the hem of his fluttering robe.

It was a grand and noble thing to be a Man!

Kor's way through the streets of No-ka-si debouched finally into a broad thoroughfare that was doubly lined with palms. Woody fronds rattled in the night breeze, seemed to crackle in the cold. The ground lost its heat quickly to the arid air, once the Sun had set, and nights always were cold on Rth.

The palm-lined avenue led straight to the crest of a low knoll, atop which glimmered the lighted windows of Lord Roen Gol's sprawling residence.

Kor tested the bark of one of the palms with his thumb-nail. The tree was real, all right. He wondered how much water was required to keep these trees alive, and if even a Lord had the right to divert so much. By and by, he came upon flowers along the way, gorgeous blooms that had been bred to wrest a hardy

livelihood from the grudging soil and to withstand the extremes of heat and cold normal in a single solar revolution.

Stars blazed inordinately, like many-colored lights strewn at random across the velvet sky. The moon had not yet risen, but a lightening of the upper-air sand clouds to the east betokened its imminent presence.

Carriages went by as he strolled up the avenue. Obviously, Lord Roen's reception was to be a lavish affair. He entered finally the broad parking place before the official residence, picked his way among parked carriages and restive horses, until he came at last to the brightly lit doorway.

Lord Roen Gol was a tall man and heavily built with high cheekbones and a jutting beak of a nose. His hair was iron-gray, and his eyes, sea-green like those of his lovely daughter, held a piercing and inquisitive stare. He greeted Kor's arrival in person, quickly wrung his hand.

"My pleasure, Sir!"

Kor replied, "My gratitude, Lord!"

They linked arms on the way into the reception room where the guests milled in light, warmth, and shrill talk-

ativeness. The air was heavy with the smell of perfumes; smoke from the scented cigars of the gentlemen drifted in billowing strata. Musical instruments caressed by a score of scantily-clad girls issued a continuous, monotonous tinkle of gaiety.

The affair was sparkling. Brightness and revelry were everywhere, but none of it meant anything at all to Kor—until he met the Lady Soma again.

What had his memory of her been, he asked himself, that it seemed so shabby in the light of her real presence? She was dressed in scarlet sequins that flashed and glittered on low-cut bodice and flowing skirt, like a ruddy pyre from which her naked shoulders emerged in cool and lustrous contrast. Her breasts were creamy above her bodice; she held her head proudly erect. Her scarlet skirt in rich folds lashed like a froth of blood about her feet. Kor took her hand, his eyes caught and held by the compelling, sea-green charm of her gaze.

Kor spoke to the father, without taking his eyes from the daughter.

"Your house is richly blessed, Lord."

Lord Roen chuckled genial-

ly, patted his daughter's arm.

"Be wary of her, Sir Kor!"

The girl flashed her father a look which was not lost upon Kor, and the Lord sobered at once. He bowed shortly, excused himself, and left the two alone.

"His Lordship seems troubled about something," Kor began.

The girl shook her head quickly, laughed with a bright, artificial sound.

"Not at all. It's a terrific strain playing host to all these people, and poor Daddy's been so overworked lately . . ."

He strolled with her through the enveloping crowd, her hand on his arm. She was quiet, walked with eyes cast down; it seemed, Kor thought, that she was embarrassed.

"Let me introduce you to the guests," she said suddenly, looking up into his face with a sudden reversal of expression, smiling, eyes sparkling. "They've all come to meet you, of course."

A sense of foreboding swirled over Kor, spoiling the delicious intimacy of their contact.

He should have extrapolated this encounter, he thought, but it was too late now to profit from it, even if he were successful at it. He

turned the task over to his superconsciousness, with a silent command to deliver any warning of danger, and forgot his foreboding in the sensations of the moment.

It seemed hours before dinner was announced, and by then, Kor had met, formally, nearly all the more important guests. Each name and face was properly filed in his memory without confusion. He would be able at any future time to recognize, or recall by name and appearance any whom he had met tonight—if he should live so long, he thought wryly.

The dinner was long and heavy. There were speeches. Kor himself had to stand and formally acknowledge introduction to the crowd in a body. At last, Lord Roen clapped his hands and the tables broke up. The air was heavy with scented cigar smoke. The guests drifted toward the next room, where music and dancing had begun already.

As Kor got to his feet and offered his arm to Lady Soma, he surprised an expression on her face which startled him. It was a look of alarm, mingled with a savage repulsion, and overlaid with grim determination, with fear and sorrow. The look vanished as

quickly as she became aware of his glance, and was replaced by a warm smile and a laughing-sparkle in her sea-green eyes.

She doesn't resemble her father except for the color of her eyes, Kor thought, deliberately wrenching his thoughts from the desolate expression he had surprised on her face. Perhaps more like her mother, or some ancestor—the loveliest woman in the world. Kor realized, with a sense of shock, that he had fallen in love with the Lady Soma.

They strolled into the ballroom. Soma almost clung to Kor's arm; her weight dragged him down. He put his arm around her in alarm.

"Soma . . . are you ill?"

She shook her head, then nodded. A look of misery swam in her eyes.

"It—it's nothing. Let's—let's go out on the terrace."

"Of course!"

The air was warm and stuffy—too much for her, Kor thought. She needed the brisk night air. He turned obediently with her in the direction of wide doors that stood open upon the nighted expanse of a terrace. As he did so, a spear-point of shrill menace darted from his supercon-

sciousness, transfixed him for a breathless instant; and left him gasping.

Death lurked on the terrace!

Kor's eyes narrowed. Lady Soma seemed to be in agony. She couldn't be faking, he told himself. Her shoulders were bent, she held her head low and breathed with difficulty, as if she were sobbing.

He steered her quickly through the dancing throng, scorning the jangle of alarm bells in his mind.

The air on the terrace was biting cold, but it carried a bracing tang that refreshed. A great, golden moon, occupying a full eighth of the quadrant, stood high in the eastern sky. It hung there like a glowing, orange shield, every crater, every ridge, rill, and ancient "sea" easily discernible to the naked eye. The moon hung close now, very close to Rth's surface. Had the oceans and seas of old still existed, the height of their tides would have staggered the imagination. But the seas were only stagnant ponds; and some day relatively soon, the moon would approach closer until, too close, it would rend itself asunder in a mighty conflict of gravitational forces. But there would be none on Rth then to see the

majesty of its destruction, or to suffer from its hurtling fragments. There would be nothing left save the bleached bones of a world bled dry by the Trisz.

But tonight in its near fullness, the moon cast an orange glow upon the garden and terrace of Lord Roen Gol, and Kor felt himself transfixed again by the voiceless urging of his superconscious mind.

He held the girl close in his arms, wrapping a fold of his cloak around her to protect her naked shoulders from the chill.

"Soma! Are you ill?" He had asked this question once before. That he asked it again was indicative of the intensity of his desire that illness was all it might be. A Saint possessed powers in this direction also, and to cleanse her of illness would take him only a moment.

The Lady Soma shook herself free of the envelopment of his cloak, thrust his supporting arm aside, and walked unsteadily to the balustrade. She toyed with a cluster of blooms that dispelled their fragrance on the frigid night.

"Lovely, aren't they? Hydroponics, of course. The tanks hidden in the stonework."

That could not be all she

had brought him out here to say. Kor would have liked to explore the mind behind those sweet, pallid features. The thought disgusted him. He could not take such a liberty—with her! A fog of menace swirled around him, seemed to choke him with its urgency.

"Something is wrong," he protested. "I should like to know what it is."

She whirled suddenly, thrusting the cluster of flowers behind her. The touch of her hand upon his arm was like the alighting of a frantic bird.

Her cheeks were deathly pale, her eyes dark and stormy. She drew red lips away from white, even teeth.

"I brought you out here, Sir Kor—" She stopped, gathered her forces, and continued. "—to have you killed!"

CHAPTER IX

KOR stepped back a pace. Soma stood rigid against the balustrade, the night-blooming blossoms a hectic background of her distraught loveliness.

"I do not kill easily!" he said.

His mind opened automatically, swept out like an expanding spring of tempered steel. He felt the impingement of

inimical presences upon his consciousness. He counted them. One, two, three, four, five, six. Six featureless shapes lurked in the deep shadow of palms in Lord Roen Gol's garden.

Kor sensed the infinitesimal stir of their bodily electrons. He reduced his vibratory rate of perception until he was merely conscious of the air whistling in and out of their lungs, the unconscious slipping of one muscle upon another, the stirring of the blood in their veins. One of the lurkers had an uneven heartbeat, he noted in passing, probably he would not live long.

Kor straightened, shaking out his cloak so that it fell cleanly from his shoulders.

"You supposed it would take six of your killers, Lady Soma? I perceive that many in your garden."

His tone dripped scorn, a scorn that hid the hurt and bewilderment that had left him stricken. How had he been wrong? Why had she done this? Was it not, rather, the machination of her father, that genial politician dancing in the next room with some fat, elderly dowager? Was not the Blue Brother also at fault, and beyond them all, the Trisz?

A burst of tinkling music

followed by a wave of applause surged through the doors and stormed the terrace.

"No," she whispered. "Be quiet. There is time. I was not to have told you that, only to bring you here, put you at your ease, then go back inside for my wrap. I—I am trying to help you!"

"Which," Kor asked wonderingly, "is the real you?"

She stepped toward him. "Come, your arm, Sir Kor. Embrace me!"

"The embrace—of death?"

"Of life! You are safe so long as I am with you. But I cannot stay long."

It was an effort for her to keep her attention strictly upon his face, to keep from looking into the darkness of the palm grove. Her manner belied her words, even, for she laughed excitedly as she talked, seemed animated and gay.

"Quickly! Your arm, Sir Kor!"

Slowly, Kor obeyed. She squirmed quickly into his grasp, laid her head on his scarlet-covered breast.

"Listen, closely. I know you can detect those men in the garden. Be ready to act if one of them moves. But pretend to be interested in me. Smile—if you can. Those men in the garden are Trisz Thugs. Do

you know what Thugs are?"

Kor knew. They were the secret murder corps of the Trisz. The Institute knew the history of the Thugs; the Men were not released wholly to be babes in the jungle.

"I know," Kor nodded, and smiled as if he had uttered a sally of wit.

"In a few moments," Lady Soma continued breathlessly, "I must go back in and leave you here alone. The instant I am safely inside the door, the Thugs have their orders to blast you where you stand."

"Why are you telling me this?"

Kor kept his mind opened, alert for the least motion among the six. All stood motionless, waiting. He sensed the tenseness of their attitudes.

"Why do you think?"

For a moment, an indescribable feeling of giddiness rushed over Kor. He thrust it brutally aside.

"I cannot believe you have a personal reason, Lady Soma."

She smiled as she looked up into his eyes, but her own were dark with the turmoil of her thoughts.

"Perhaps; perhaps not. Let us say this, then—that I am a woman of the People. My

father is Lord of this region. Do we not also owe a duty to the People, even as great as that assumed by the Men?"

Kor was troubled. What did she know of the Men's duty toward the People?

She said, "Sir Ten Roga was a great friend, Kor. We know things, my father and I, that we cannot tell even to you—and we know things about the Men that neither the People nor the Trisz know. Is that enough? Must I tell you also that not only is your own life forfeit, but that of my father, also?" She paused to control the rising passion in her voice.

"Let me tell it to you quickly. I must not linger too long. You see me now as the daughter of my father. I am also a spy in the city. I work on the staff of the Trisz Extrapolator. My father does not know that, of course. He would object if he did. But he has been playing a dangerous game, himself. He is allied with the Men, Kor. To help drive the Trisz out of our world!"

Kor listened calmly, analyzing the words that fell from her lips. The semantics were clean and proper, he detected no overtones of falsehood.

"Go on," he said quietly.

"Recently my father concluded a brotherhood pact with the Lord of Set-loo. Be-

fore, there had been some feuding between them, and flare-ups of fighting between our opposing troops were common. The Lord of Set-loo misunderstood certain things, but my father ironed out these difficulties with him. The Trisz were at the bottom of the discord, of course. It is an open secret that they encourage poor relations among the various districts. My father undertook to make his pact with the Lord of Set-loo in secret, but the Trisz found out. The Trisz punish secrecy of this kind with death. Your death will be the signal for my father's arrest. He will be publicly executed for your murder."

"Not all you say is understandable."

"I cannot make it more plain. There is not time. My real identity is not known where I serve the Trisz. I was chosen to attend this function as my other self to lure you within blaster range of the Thugs. I had to let myself be chosen, you see, because only I could have given you warning!"

She moved away from him.

"Now there is no more time. I must go in and get my wrap."

"Wait!" Kor caught her by the shoulder, spun around to

face him. "You would walk off like this, knowing that in another moment I will be blasted to a charred crust?"

She smiled, calmly possessed of herself.

"Not you, Kor. I told you I know things about the Men. You can save yourself. I have given you the opportunity. Good-bye, Kor."

"Wait!" She hesitated, poised. He rushed on. "If you are asked ever to identify me—swear you have never seen me before. Claim that you talked with an imposter here tonight. You understand?"

She nodded, wide-eyed, then hurried through the open doors.

And Kor reacted. The softly swaying palm fronds froze into icy petals. All sound stopped. The air was solid around him. The universe stood still.

The action he must follow came to him in a burst of rationalization. With infinite deliberation, Kor palped with his mind the six motionless figures in the garden. There was one about his own size.

The time-stasis—actually, the acceleration of Kor's consciousness of time—brought its own peculiar set of conditions into play. Kor was living fast at an extremely high rate

of molecular vibration. Every molecule in his body vibrated at such tremendous speed that his body no longer bore any relationship to normal matter, but was matter beyond matter. If he continued to remain in one position long enough for an observer's eye to react, he would seem to have disappeared completely. What Kor had to do required doing in that brief fraction of a second before he would appear to vanish into nothing before the eyes of the watching Thugs.

Kor's body vibrated at a vastly accelerated time rate, and his mind with it, but the air around him was not affected. It held him as if in a strait jacket until he expanded the influence of the time-stasis to include a small space around him. Then he sighted a straight path to the Thug he had chosen for reason of his size, and cast a pathway of accelerated air molecules ahead of him as he went.

The Thug lay on the ground, frozen, immobile, squinting along the barrel of an ugly looking blaster. Already, Kor thought, his finger is tightening on the release stud.

The Thug's body seemed hard as a rock. Kor could not have budged him had he tried. The matter now composing his

body could have no effect upon matter of the world he had left. Except for the supersensitive apperception of his mind, he would have been blind in this lightless, soundless universe of his own.

Kor mentally adjusted the influence of the time-stasis to include the Thug, bringing them together into the same vibratory rate, and kicked him hard on the jaw before he could stir. The Thug grunted and collapsed.

Quickly, Kor stripped himself of his scarlet garments and changed clothing with the unconscious Thug. That done, he slung the fellow over his shoulder, ran with him back to the terrace, and stood him in exactly the spot he himself had occupied before, restoring him to consciousness and withdrawing the influence of the time-stasis as he did so.

The Thug stood like a statue in the rigid garments of the Scarlet Saint. Kor ran back to the Thug's deserted post, picked up the discarded blaster, and returned his time rate to normal.

The Thug stood where Kor had left him. He had started to lift his arms, and in a moment he would have shouted. The Lady Soma's back flashed out of sight into the mael-

strom of dancers within the ballroom.

The fractional second was past. None could have seen the substitution. Five lances of flame rayed out of the darkness—and an instant behind, a sixth, as Kor brought his captured weapon into play. The gesticulating figure on the terrace writhed in coruscating flame, vanished behind the flower-covered balustrade. The hideous noise of the blasters stuttered into silence.

Very well, Kor thought grimly. Let us see what comes now.

He ran after the sound of racing footsteps as the Thugs sped for the open. He almost collided with the group as they reached the first row of town houses. One who seemed to be leader was haranguing the rest. He stopped as Kor came running up.

"There you are, Nar! You were slow! Get this, we scatter here and work back toward the city from different directions to avoid suspicion. You all know why we can not be connected with this business. Now, get going!"

The Thugs darted off in all directions. Kor dallied a moment, then strolled leisurely away, blaster hidden under the rough brown cloak he had taken from the Thug.

He could imagine the commotion which now ensued at the palace of Lord Roen Gol. He thought of the Lady Soma, and a warmth enfolded him. He hoped she would not think the smoking wreck on her father's terrace was he. He paused, let his mind flash back to the scene of carnage and touch that reeking corpse. Swirling electrons flashed through Kor's consciousness, a flood of bright stars that swarmed down as if to engulf him. His mind was in the body of the dead man, sorting, classifying, photographing the structure of its matter down to the last element. He would need the matrix to complete the plan which had come to him.

Kor knew what he had to do, if he wanted to return to his Chapel. And return he must, if he would get to the bottom of this business. But that was not the whole reason, either; part of it was contained in a pair of sparkling, sea-green eyes, and in warm, enfolding arms.

He swept his surroundings with his expanding mind, seeking an empty dwelling. The hour was late, and in the pallid moonglow, the city slept. The moon rode above the city like a gargantuan,

pockmarked face, featureless and cold.

Every place Kor's mind entered, it touched one or more sleeping minds that stirred sluggishly at the contact.

He quickened his steps, slinking along against a wall, on the side of the street opposite the moonglow. He was engulfed in shadow. Somewhere, there must be an empty house. He sensed it from a distance, reconnoitered its surroundings. No living soul was abroad. The house was unfurnished and empty.

Kor selected a spot in the central living chamber. His mind sought a pattern of electrons in the smooth, plastic floor. He made the change-over without a pause in his stride and came to a halt in the middle of the deserted living room. There was no light, but Kor did not need any. His super sense searched the dwelling carefully, told him his earlier survey had been correct. The house was unoccupied.

Kor squatted on the hard plastic floor. In the back of his mind electrons swirled, coalesced, drove in a quickening stream and hovered in the air about him, motes of light that danced like fireflies in the grass. Whirling, circling, swooping, they drove round

and round him, lighting the room with an eerie glow. Kor's eyes were open, his hands extended downward, his gaze fixed on the floor between and beneath them. It was toward this point that the milling motes of light were driven. Something was building there . . . something was taking shape from the blinking swarm that spiralled and swept downward and vanished into its growing, dark-some bulk.

It took perhaps a minute. When Kor had concluded, a facsimile of the blistered corpse that had lain on Lord Roen Gol's terrace graced the plastic floor in front of him.

CHAPTER X

Safe again in his own quarters, Kor carefully destroyed the Trizsman garb he had worn by disassembling its structure, molecule by molecule. That done, he bathed in a sparing amount of water and donned scarlet raiment once more. Then he rang for an acolyte and gave orders to fetch Brother Set.

"No doubt," he said abruptly as the Blue Brother entered his study, "you are surprised to see me still alive, Brother Set?"

The Blue Brother shook his

round head. A faint smile twitched his lips.

"I cannot say that I am, Sir Kōr. Should I be?"

"If not surprised, then disappointed—or distressed . . . what is the word I am looking for?"

"Discomfited is probably the word you are groping for, Sir, but it is hardly appropriate. I am at a loss to supply a better."

Kor glowered at him.

"Brother Set, we may as well have it out between us now. Twice on my journey from the Institute, you had me set upon with intent to kill . . ."

"Sir!" Brother Set's voice vibrated with innocent shock.

"It will do no good to protest your innocence. I scanned your image from the mind of the murderer you sent when your first pair of Thugs failed.

Brother Set chuckled.

"I thought perhaps you had. You walked in here with a chip on your shoulder from the beginning. You must forgive me that slip, Sir. I had not much time after the Thugs returned with a tale of failure. I was obliged to act quickly, so I contacted the fellow in person."

"You don't deny it?"

"Did you expect a denial?"

Come, Sir Kor! So I have tried to have you killed! What is that between friends . . . when we know that a Scarlet Saint is practically unkillable by such methods?"

Kor's eyes narrowed.

"So you know that, do you? You are wrong; the Men *can* be killed. Tonight, for instance, I ran a very dangerous risk with my life. That I escaped is beside the point. You know that my Oath does not permit me to harm human life, unless my own is in danger. It seems to me that you are the biggest danger facing me at the moment, Brother Set."

"Kill me, then," the Blue Brother urged guilelessly, "if you believe it will free you of danger." He smiled his saintly smile. "After all, Sir, I merely carry out the orders of my civil superiors, who receive them directly from the Trisz. It is a part of my duty to obey the Trisz and carry out the orders of the civil authorities. You have your oath and I have mine."

Kor scowled. "If you know your plots to kill me are bound to fail, why do you persist?"

Brother Set shrugged.

"I am quite indifferent to the situation, Sir. As I said, I merely act under orders. Those orders imply that you

will be killed—and you will be."

"You have other plans, then?"

"Not I. You may as well know, Sir; that the situation here is intolerable for you. It is not possible for you to remain alive. The Trisz have decreed death for you, and there is an end to the matter."

"How did the Trisz kill Sir Ten Roga?"

Again the Blue Brother shrugged. "I do not know."

"Where does Lord Roen Gol fit into this?"

"He was to have been charged with your murder and eliminated by public execution. His Lordship had begun to dabble in treason, and the Trisz have a predilection for order. Their own kind of order."

"I was to be killed to afford an excuse for the legal murder of Lord Roen Gol? Then why the first two attempts, during my journey here?"

Brother Set yawned politely, covering his mouth with his hand.

"I cannot answer all of your questions. After all, I am not a Scarlet Saint. I am merely a Brother of the Order, attempting to carry out his duties."

Kor said, calculatingly,

"You would have liked to be a Saint, wouldn't you?"

"Was I chosen? I serve well enough in my place."

"Indeed, you do. I can find no fault with your actions. I wonder only how much of what you seem to know about the Men has been communicated to the Trisz?"

Brother Set turned away. "Is that the reward for my discreetness? I have told them nothing. Suppose they suspected half as much as I, as you put it, seem to know?"

"Perhaps they do."

"Not likely. They would wipe you out to the last Man."

Kor bristled. "Then why do they seek my life?"

"You have heard of the Extrapolator?"

Kor remained silent, staring impassively.

"I assume you have," the Blue Brother went on, unperturbed. "The machine predicted your coming as a danger to the Trisz. You doubtless know that."

Kor did not deign an affirmative reply.

"The machine has made another utterance."

Kor started. "It has?"

"Aha! I thought so!" Brother Set was again his genial, angelic self. "You would like to know what the

machine says about you now, wouldn't you?"

Kor drew himself up haughtily. "It makes no difference. I could pry the information out of you, if I chose."

"I believe you could, Sir. Anybody who could sizzle and fry one instant in the flames of six blasters, and the next be found running down the street with the murderers—"

Kor peered at him closely. "What do you know about that?"

"Not everything. I have heard that a fellow called Nar is missing. About your size, too. Some remembered that Nar joined them after the fracas, but he hasn't been seen since. I think it was you who joined the Thugs after the shooting."

"It was I." Kor paused, thinking. "Brother Set, I believe you when you say that the Trisz intend having me killed. There may be a way to defeat them, however. You can be with me or against me."

"As I suggested, Sir, you could kill me and obviate the question."

Kor regarded him queerly. "I am sure you would not care if I did. But a Man cannot kill wantonly. If you attacked me, I could, and it would not vio-

late my Oath. However, I should rather have you with me, Brother Set."

"I should prefer to be neither for you nor against you. Most of all, to remain alive!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"My own well being requires that I serve my Masters, who are the Trisz. Can I serve you, too, and not be in danger from them?" He shuddered fastidiously. "I am sure you would have more compunction than they! Anyway, so far as I am concerned, you are as good as dead. I should gain nothing by serving you. But I may tell you one thing."

"And that is—?"

"The matter of the Extrapolator's prediction."

"I believe that it predicts my death," Kor rejoined stiffly.

"Indeed, yes. But some are worried by the terms in which the prognosis is couched."

"It is vaguely expressed?"

"Let me recite it for you." The Blue Brother closed his eyes, recollecting the pronouncement. He rubbed his paunch delicately. "Here it is! 'The Scarlet Saint will die undead; pots and pans depart instead.' Does it make sense to you, Sir?"

"It is a mess of contradic-

tions! What is it to die 'undead'? Where do pots and pans fit into it? What does it mean?"

"That is just how the Trisz felt about it, Sir. Many times, however, the machine's pronouncements do not seem to bear the scrutiny of common sense—until after the event has come to pass."

"I should hope they made no sense of it," Kor interjected.

"Hope in vain, Sir. The Trisz have clearly realized the meaning of this bit of doggerel. They interpret it this way . . ." The Blue Brother paused, listened delicately, and smiled. "If I am not mistaken, Sir Kor—no, I am not—the Trisz soldiers are here now. It would be useless to tell you more!"

There was no opportunity to escape. The soldiers rushed into the room, blasters levelled. There was an uproar of stamping feet, barked commands. The soldiers surrounded Kor in a ring.

"You are under arrest, Sir Kor!" cried the officer of the guard.

Kor protested. "I claim the sanctuary of the Chapel! You cannot arrest me in the house of the Lord Sun."

The officer suddenly spied the blaster Kor had laid on a

table. He picked it up, smiling grimly.

"A blaster is contraband to any but the lawful guard of the Trisz. Your possession of it nullifies your resort to sanctuary. Will you come peacefully?"

Kor shrugged. "Very well. Put away your weapons."

Brother Set smiled with saintly pleasure as they led Kor away.

The room in which they put Kor was high up in the tower of the Administration Center. It measured hardly three paces one way by four the other, and there was not an item of furniture in it to relieve the monotony of smooth, colorless plastic. A dim light overhead cast the room into a fishbowl of pallid illumination.

As soon as the door was shut behind him, Kor's submissive attitude vanished. He darted first to one wall and then to another, laying his palms against the cool, featureless plastic. He opened his mind, reached out just enough to penetrate the wall. Electrons swirled in his consciousness, flitting, flickering motes of seeming luminescence. Kor scanned the stream, poring over it, identifying, classifying, recording.

He found the blaster behind the rear wall without diffi-

culty. It was rigged for remote control, and adjusted to spray the room with a broad cone of lethal radiation. Kor put his mind into the weapon, located the fuse that normally prevented overcharge of the circuit with consequent kick-back on the operator. He carefully fused it to render the weapon useless.

With equal ease, Kor located the visor that watched him. It was hidden in the filament of the dimly burning lamp. It was complete with a microscopic pick-up for sound. Kor closed his mind, dropped to his knees and began to pray aloud.

If ritual prayers to the Sun could not bore the Trisz sufficiently, he thought, he could afford them other diversion later. Having finished his prayers at last, Kor exercised briefly, wrapped himself in his scarlet cloak, lay down on the hard plastic floor, and promptly fell asleep.

It must have been morning when Kor awoke. In this windowless chamber, he could not tell whether the time was night or day, but he had mentally set himself for six hours of sleep, so it must be day by now. The dim lamp still burned overhead, and at the other end of the visio-audio hook-up, doubtless, Triszmen still watched.

Again Kor performed the ritual exercises of the Chapel, recited his morning prayers to the Sun, sang a canticle, then settled himself to await the Trisz' pleasure. When food was brought, Kor turned the bearer back at the door.

"A Man lives not by food alone," he pronounced. "Go—I have other matters to digest."

He carefully adjusted his metabolism to compensate for lack of food and continued to wait.

Shortly thereafter, the locking mechanism in the door whirled again. The guard ushered in a slovenly, middle-aged woman and clanged the door shut behind her.

"Are you the Man Kor?" she asked.

Kor regarded her closely. She held herself slouchily erect. Her lined cheeks sagged, and her eyes were puffed to mere slits. She wore a black kerchief over her hair. The saffron robe of a Trizsman wrapped her.

She said, peering at him, "Are you the Man Kor?"

Kor was wary, but he did not hesitate. He expanded his mind slightly and withdrew it. He was satisfied. He smiled and bowed politely.

"I am the Man Kor," he replied.

The woman's voice sounded cracked from over-indulgence in synth.

"You aren't the Man I met at Roen Gol's!"

Kor's mind crept into the dimly glowing bulb overhead. He held the woman's gaze with his own, located the sight-and-sound pick-up. Electrons swirled in his mind. He counted, selected two, turned a quadrant, and thrust. Overhead, one electron nudged another. A third dropped out of its orbit. The Trisz-spy-device went dead.

Kor touched the woman's arm. He felt the instantaneous surge in every atom of his body as the time-stasis took hold. He freed the rigid air around them and stepped back, grinning.

"You may come out of your disguise, Lady Soma!"

CHAPTER XII

Kor's pronouncement shocked his caller. She looked uncertainly at him and around the room, made as if to speak.

Kor said, "We cannot be observed, so you can drop your disguise if you like. I have taken care of everything; just do not move from your position."

The dim ceiling light still

glowed, its photo-vibrations altered to permit visibility within the zone of the time-stasis.

Suddenly she smiled and sighed. The puffed masses dropped from her eyes. Her cheeks grew firm, young and healthy-looking. She quickly straightened her shoulders. Her sea-green eyes sparkled at him. Kor looked and yearned for her.

"How did you know it was I?" she asked.

"I recognized the technique of your disguise," he said, dispelling the feeling that gripped him. "Sir Ten Roga must have taught you."

"He did. I know it's an elementary change, but it's the best I can do. Sir Ten said the Men can change their whole bodily structure at will, but he never demonstrated."

"True. A Man has full control over the individual molecules of his body-mass."

Soma became entirely practical.

"Kor, I came here for one reason, to carry out the request you made last night, to convince the Trisz you are not the Man who attended my father's reception. I am supposed to identify you for the Trizsmen. I asked to come."

"I guessed as much from your opening words. How-

ever, I am glad you are here. There are a few things I must know from you. Was your father arrested last night?"

"No. We had it planned in advance. Fast horses were ready. He escaped into the desert to join the Organization."

"What organization?"

"I cannot tell even you, Kor. Some day, you will find the Organization for yourself—if you live. I cannot entrust the knowledge to you . . . yet. If you can get out of this present situation — as by walking through the wall . . ."

He shrugged the thought aside.

"Tell me about yourself. You said you work on the staff of the Trisz Extrapolator. That can be very important."

She nodded vigorously. "I lead rather a double life. When I am not Lady Soma, I am Tasa Lanor, punch-card co-ordinator in the files section of the Extrapolator. It was as Tasa Lanor that I volunteered to meet you at the reception; you must have noticed that I kept my face hidden from the Thugs in the garden?"

Kor said, "I recall that you did. Very well. What about the Extrapolator? I hear it is a machine that predicts the future."

"Machine!" Lady Soma laughed shortly. "It is a monster! A brain, really. It occupies an entire building. Four hundred and eight floors are devoted to the mechanism alone, two hundred of them below ground-level. Nearly a thousand floors are taken up with the technical staff, the clerical staff, the correlating division, the records division, the historical division, the traffic division, and scores of other divisions!"

"Rather a complex device for the mere purpose of holding the People subject, isn't it?"

"You mean—oh, predicting riot, sedition and plot isn't all the machine does! It's a mathematical computer of the highest order, and it thinks for itself. It really does. I couldn't name all the things it does, besides predicting the future. And of course, it isn't for Trisz use alone, either. It belongs to all the People. Anyone with a question about his future has the privilege of querying the Extrapolator. Many do. It's a part of the Trisz . . . benevolence."

"I suppose the machine disclosed your father's activities with the Lord of Set-loo?"

She nodded soberly. "Yes. When border fighting between

my father's troops and the troops of Set-loo came to a halt, the information, with some other material, was fed to the machine. The civil authorities were excited by the machine's response and took it to the Trisz. The Trisz ordered my father's extermination along with yours."

"I am new to the ways of the world," Kor mused. "I cannot understand why the Trisz do not act as pleases them. Why they do not deal with their enemies on the spot, as it were."

"The Trisz like to maintain an appearance of benevolence," she replied. "There is a false semblance of self-rule among the People. The People are more easily kept in check if they do not realize too deeply that the Trisz are their masters. We still have our own law courts, that have not been tampered with, but these are only for dealing with the common run of crimes among the People. When treason is the charge, the Trisz themselves are judge and jury, and the trials are conducted in secret. An excuse has to be found for the arrest—even if the Trisz have to manufacture an excuse. Like the blaster they claim to have found in your quarters."

"That was quite my own

fault," Kor explained. "I was in possession of it. It is part of the story I have planned to tell at my trial."

Her shoulders sagged. "Do you know that they charge you with murder?"

"I rather expected they would. I have my defense ready."

"It will avail you nothing. Possessing the blaster sealed off your last excuse, if anything else were needed. It is death to possess one illegally."

"Then it would do me no good to plead innocent of murdering that fellow on your father's terrace?"

"Nor the other one whose body was discovered in a deserted house. Did you kill either of them? I— don't believe you did!"

She could not guess, Kor thought, that the second body she referred to was only a duplicate of the first. As long as the Trisz did not suspect it, he was sanguine enough to believe he might win his freedom. Extrapolating the problem had done him no good. He could abstract nothing encouraging. He could only hope.

He said, "Soma, whatever you may hear in the future, I hope you will continue to believe my innocence, because such is the truth. On the other

hand, I intend to confess to both murders!"

She did not change expression. "I do not question the wisdom of your actions, Sir Kor. Through Sir Ten and the Organization, I have learned to trust Men implicitly."

Kor tried to question her further about the Organization, but Soma shook her head, smiling tightly.

"I have my Oath, too, Kor. Perhaps, if the Trisz . . ."

"Let me live?"

"I was about to say, have misinterpreted the machine's latest utterance concerning you."

Kor quoted the silly jingle. "What does it mean 'die undead'? Can you tell me?"

"The Trisz think they know what it means. They take it both literally and metaphorically. The opinion is that you will quite literally die. They applied the word 'undead' to the machine for a semantic break-down and got a complex variety of interpretations, from which they have made a tentative series of conclusions. Dead means no longer having life, as a dead person is one who was once living. Undead is not the opposite of dead, but is a condition of death. The result of a person suffering death is a dead body. A

person suffering death and leaving no body is equally dead, but there is no 'dead' residue remaining. Do you see the implication?"

"They expected the concentrated blast of six blasters to reduce me to atoms," Kor put in. "It sounds reasonable, if we accept that reasoning. No body would be left. But that did not happen—disregarding the identity of the body. The dead man fell behind the stone balustrade and was covered from the blaster fire."

"Yes. So the Trisz knew immediately that you had escaped, if you were ever there. The fact did not coincide with the prediction, you see. They had their troops ready to close in on the Chapel to arrest you, knowing that if you did escape, you would go there immediately . . . as you did."

"I think I can guess my ultimate fate," Kor smiled grimly. "I am to be fed to the atomic converters in the power section of the city. That is a popular form of execution for condemned criminals, isn't it?"

She nodded, looking at him. He noticed how dark her eyes appeared.

"Well, what about the pots and pans? Gibberish?"

She shook her head. "The machine never utters gibber-

ish, but it frequently speaks metaphorically. 'Pots and pans' refers to the civil troubles the Trisz hope to prevent through their present action. The pots and pans departing idea is exemplified by my father's escape into the desert—a prediction, you see, that was not accurately interpreted at any time, until my father departed."

A stream of flashing electrons cut across Kor's consciousness. The time-limit he had set was expiring.

Kor spoke almost cheerfully. "Time's up! Now remember. You came here to see if I am the Man who was at your father's reception."

"I am to report immediately after seeing you."

"You have already reported. There is a visio-audio spy device hidden in the filament of that lamp up there. It picked up the first words you uttered when you came in."

Soma's face paled.

"You mean they have been listening?"

"They heard only your first words. How long do you think we have talked?"

"Five minutes — ten? Oh, no, it must be longer than that!"

"Considerably less than one-thousandth part of a second," Kor told her with

amusement. "In another thousandth of a second, the spy-device will become automatically re-activated, with none the wiser. Right now, we are outside of normal time. Before we go back, re-arrange your disguise, and when I speak to you, continue as you started when you entered. We will again be under observation."

Electrons swirled in a mad dance of sparkling motes. Kor searched, located, identified, nudged electrons back into their places.

"I am sure I never saw you before, Madame," he said respectfully.

The woman Tasa Lanor shrugged, looking him up and down.

"Nor could I be mistaken about you, Sir."

She turned quickly to the door, banged on it with both fists.

Alone, Kor thought the matter over. He had no fear that the watching Triszman had noted his tampering with their spy-device. Their slow physical reaction would not have observed the momentary flickering of the screen image, nor was it likely that the interruption could have been noticed by the recording machines.

At any rate, the situation was clearer to Kor than it had ever been. The Lady Soma had been a help in establishing the groundwork of the story he planned to tell the Trisz when he came up for trial. If the Trisz condemned him now, it would be in spite of his defense, and not because of it.

Kor could visualize the sensation that was being made of his arrest. Every television screen in the city, if not in the world, would be keeping the People abreast of developments.

Kor pondered his position, but no simple solution appeared. He was in an anomalous situation; he could leave any time he chose, but he dared not choose. He wondered if his act of recreating the charred corpse of the Thug had been a false move, but third order rationalization had seemed to call for it. He went over the logic of it again, by-passing the third-order parts to his superconsciousness. It came out the same: the artificial life line created by his premeditated actions crossed his destiny-line at this juncture. He was precisely where he ought to be: in the power of the Trisz.

He could not believe that his destiny led to death in the atomic converters. He stood,

therefore, at a crisis. He had to find his way out of this impasse before Trisz judgment could be carried out against him.

Desire is our scourge, Need is our blessing. The key lay in the ritual, he knew that. The ritual was the key to all things. *Resolve is our armor; Will is our weapon . . . Faith . . .* The ritual key could solve any problem when applied through third-order reasoning. But the problem still baffled Kor.

Kor was moved to another and larger-furnished cell and provided with personal toilet articles. Before settling down, however, he located the blaster behind the wall and rendered it useless. Thereafter, he settled himself to await the Trisz' pleasure.

Three days after his arrest, Kor was notified of his trial. The Triszman officer who came to his cell was stern-visaged as he read the charges for the prisoner's benefit. Kor listened in silence, and permitted himself to be led away to trial before the Trisz.

He faced his judge and accuser alone in a tiny chamber no larger than the one from which he had been taken, except that this room had a bay in one wall, in which the

spindle-shaped Trisz vibrated a dull crimson, silent, inscrutable.

Television cameras had followed Kor to his reception, had focused on his back as he entered the Trisz chamber of justice. He knew that now an excited commentator was on the screen, recapitulating the Trisz version of the case for the benefit of watchers. None would see what went on within the chamber; none would know the story Kor had to tell save the Trisz.

He braced himself against the hopelessness of the situation. The thin, reedy, mental "voice" of the Trisz cut across Kor's consciousness.

"Man, you have heard the charges against you. Your own kind accuse you of dissidence, sedition, and treason against the Trisz. You are further accused of the murder of one Nar Dillon of the People, and of a Person unknown. You are charged as well with illegal possession of a blaster . . . a capital offense in itself. If you have anything to say before sentence is passed upon you, you may gesture for the recorders."

On one knee, Kor signed his reply.

"I am innocent of these charges, O mighty Trisz—save that I did have in my

possession the illegal weapon. Here is my defense:

"I received an invitation from the Lord Roen Gol, who will attest to the truth of this statement, to attend a reception in my honor. This is a function well established in custom, as the mighty Trisz know. Scorning transportation the short distance to his Lordship's residence, I decided to walk—"

Kor told his story straightforwardly, without a falter. He had, he said, about half way to his goal, been set upon by two men, who overcame him and dragged him into a deserted house. There, he said, one of his captors stole his raiment, leaving his companion to guard him.

"From their talk," Kor explained, "I gathered that these two used this means to gain entrance to the estate in order to kidnap his Lordship's young daughter, to hold for ransom from her father."

Vigorously, then, Kor signed an account of the fight he had had overpowering his guard. The blaster had been discharged in the struggle and his captor killed.

So far, so good, Kor thought. The Trisz had not wanted to admit their puzzlement over that secondary corpse. So now they had an

explanation, which could only puzzle them more.

Kor went on to relate that he had hastened then to Lord Roen Gol's residence and had seen a woman on the terrace, struggling in the grip of one who was dressed in the garments of a Scarlet Saint . . . undoubtedly his own. As he watched, the woman broke free and darted back inside.

"As I stood there, O mighty Trisz," Kor went on, "debating what to do, a sudden rain of blaster fire whipped through the garden, engulfing the imposter in flames. My own captured weapon was also leveled. The noise of the blasters startled me, so that unconsciously I depressed the firing stud, and the weapon fired.

"I therefore claim the benevolent protection of the mighty Trisz, and plead innocent to the charges of murder against me. The one man died by his own hand as I fought in self-defense, and the other was murdered by those who were obviously his accomplices in the kidnaping scheme, angered at seeing him allow the Lord's daughter to escape.

"As for the charges of dissidence, sedition and treason, I can only plead innocent. And for possessing the blaster, I

throw myself on the mercy of the Trisz, who can read from my mind the true occurrences as they happened."

The Trisz replied immediately. "Man, there is evidence in your mind that what you say may be largely truth. You are a clever dissembler, however, and have learned how to mask your deepest thoughts. The Trisz are willing to dismiss the charges of murder, but your association with Lord Roen Gol, a known traitor, and your possession of the blaster convict you of the remaining charges. These are crimes against the Trisz, whereas murder is a crime against the People. Crimes against the Trisz are punishable by death."

It was only what Kor had expected, but he felt suddenly collapsed. Why had he played into their hands by taking that blaster along? Third-order reasoning had called for the action;—third-order reasoning was never wrong. Kor bowed his head.

"O benevolent Trisz," he gestured. "I have but one further request to make."

"Speak, Man."

"I asked that my body be returned to the Institute for burial in that sacred ground."

The Trisz hummed thoughtfully. "That is impossible,

Man. The course of execution is set by expedience and custom. You will die instantly and painlessly, in complete dissolution of your physical body. There will be nothing left to bury."

Kor paced his cell vigorously. He wondered how long he had before the execution. He had to discover something quickly, an unlikely probability here in this room where nothing had yet come to him. He carefully opened his mind and explored the blaster covering him. Somebody had discovered the damaged fuse and replaced it. He did not want anything premature to happen—like the unlooked for discharge of that weapon. He carefully nudged a few electrons and made the blaster useless again.

Kor's mind busied itself with his problem. In spite of the Trisz verdict, he had no feeling of the imminence of dissolution. He was in peril, certainly. But the future did not appear to hold death. If this were so, then deliverance was still to come. Kor seized upon this thought and submitted it to the third-order processes of his mind. He heaved a sigh and relaxed. Of course. The time had not yet come for his need to assert itself. At

present, he was safer here than he could be anywhere else. He had only to wait—wait for the eleventh hour.

Scarcely an hour passed before Kor was removed from his cell, prodded into an elevator, and dropped swiftly he knew not how many levels below the surface. Two officers accompanied him. They were met at the bottommost level by three guards with drawn blasters. The five surrounded Kor and conducted him down a long corridor to a pneumatic tube car station. They got into the waiting tube car, which shot away, then slowed to a stop in a matter of seconds.

Kor disembarked in the eye-searing blaze of illumination that encompassed the city's massive heart. Great machines arrayed themselves as far as he could see in every direction. A forest of pillars, girdered and trussed, supported the roof of this artificial cavern. Everywhere, the machines that fed life to the city hummed, whirled, shot sparks, emitted a strong odor of ozone.

A score of uniformed, blast-er-armed guards were waiting. The officers and guards who had accompanied Kor returned to their tube car. Kor was marched through the maze of machinery until he

stood before a leaden wall, studded with meters, dials, and great doors that looked like the breech-blocks of monster cannon. All along the wall, chain conveyors, one to each door, rattled in starts and jerks. As the nearest conveyor jerked forward, a thick lead door swung open . . . the chains rattled in with a load of trivia . . . the door swung shut. Further away, another door opened, the conveyor jerked and rattled. Up and down the length of this endless wall, the process repeated itself intermittently, the conveyors feeding the ravening atomic converters that filled the veins, arteries, and nervous system of this great city with the vibrant power of its artificial life.

Each time a door opened, Kor noticed, the dial above it dropped to zero. As the door closed on a load of waste, the needle jumped upward, registering the last quantum of energy released from its dissolution. He knew that when his own body was fed to this vast, unfriendly machine, that needle would leap again, registering the amount of energy released from the atoms of his body. Somewhere, a recording machine would take note of the amount with an arrangement of perforations in a

tape. That was all that would remain of the Man Kor: an arrangement of holes in a very brief length of tape.

Kor was not insensible, either, to the occasion that was being made of his execution. Already the news of his condemnation had been broadcast, and every eye in the city was turned to the televisior screens. Television cameras peered at Kor silently from a dozen angles.

Kor held himself rigidly erect. He was a Man. He had no plan, except to submit to whatever lay in store for him. He would die like a Man, if need be. *Need.* Again he heard the voice of Tor Shan monotonously intoning the Oath held precious by the Scarlet Saints . . . *"I solemnly vow never to use my powers against any of the Trisz . . . though I lose my life . . ."*

Men had died before at the behest of the Trisz. To dart away now, as Kor longed to do, would betray the Brotherhood; worse, betray the very People to whom the Brotherhood of Men was dedicated, and the Rth and the Universe, too. What did his life matter, Kor asked himself?

A conveyor had been switched from automatic to manual. It stood moveless and ready. Naked to the waist,

Kor was led to it, stretched out on the cold chains and lashed fast. Kor looked up into a blaze of light and the snout of an unblinking, emotionless, television camera. On the other side of that lens, a million People watched. Kor imagined their stir of feelings, and he smiled.

A smartly uniformed officer paced to Kor's side. He read sententiously from a sealed and beribboned document.

"Kor Danay, of the Brotherhood of Men, formerly Man of the See of No-ka-si, you have been examined and found guilty of crimes against the Trisz; to wit, dissidence, sedition, treason, and illegal possession. For these offenses, Trisz justice requests the death penalty, to be administered humanely, without pain or physical suffering, by dissolution in the atomic converter. You are permitted to beg forgiveness of the Lord Sun for your crimes before the sentence is carried into execution."

Kor lifted his head. "I have made my peace with my God," he said quietly.

The officer folded the paper smartly and stepped back a pace.

"May the Lord Sun have mercy on your soul, Sir Kor!"

(To be continued)



OF THE seven volumes reviewed below, three are novels, three are short story collections, and one is an anthology. Six of the seven are authored or edited by names familiar and of high repute in the field. The publishers, having shaken out the writing neophytes who were attracted to the genre by the brouhaha of recent years, are now publishing books worth your attention. Cases in point:

TUNNEL IN THE SKY. *By Robert A. Heinlein. Scribner's. \$2.50.*

Every s-f addict will want to get this one. First, it's by the Stevenson of science fiction. Second, although labelled a juvenile, it's better than most adult releases. Third, it's a well-written, rip-roaring high adventure by an author who never cheats, never skimps, and is always vividly persuasive.

Rod Walker, 18-year-old senior in a high school of the 21st Century, takes his Advanced Survival test on an unknown star planet, using the Ramsbotham Jump, an instantaneous portal device. In his era, such arduous tests are necessary to insure the survival of future starmen. Knocked unconscious and stripped of his equipment, Rod becomes a man as he realizes that something has gone wrong; that he and other young testees are marooned hundreds of light years from Earth. Overcoming dangers as real as they are strange, Rod forms a colony and becomes its head until the day when contact is once more established, and he faces a new adventure as arduous, in a different way, as the ones he has successfully conquered. You'll find this account of youngsters learning to get along with each other under the most adverse circumstances as

fascinating as "Robinson Crusoe," as ingenious as "The Swiss Family Robinson," and in the grand tradition of both.

THE GIRLS FROM PLANET 5. *By Richard Tucker. Ballantine. Cloth: \$2. Paper: 35¢.*

By 1998, the U.S. is a matriarchy, with only the proud state of Texas a maverick refuge for men who would be men. Dave Hull, reporter, flees Biddy-land for Texas, and is there when a strange spaceship, manned by beautiful girls, the Lyru, invades the nation. Dave discovers that the lovely Lyru are actually under the control of aged crones who keep their captives devoid of will. With the aid of Colonel Sam Buckskin, leader of the Texas Legion, Dave manages to expose the crones, free their beautiful captives, diminish the power of the matriarchy, win back his fiancée, and marry off Col. Buckskin.

Half-satire and half-serious, this novel's only fault is its confusion of motives. If Mr. Tucker had made it all Thorne Smith, or conversely, had written a tale of pure suspense, his book's impact would be greater. Nonetheless, it is a highly enjoyable raucous and risible tale.

THIS FORTRESS WORLD. *By James E. Gunn. Gnome Press. \$3.00.*

Set in the far future, James Gunn's latest book displays the talents of an author who can plot skillfully, envision his characters fully, and write with undeniable power. The book's one fault (if such it be) is that it is too crammed—with action, with plot twists, with ideas. Yet how much better to get a plumcake of a book, filled with the thickly-packed fruits of an able writer's mind, than to starve on the air-filled confections of less adept authors!

William Dane, an acolyte in the powerful Church of a star planet, renounces his order when he sees a beautiful girl cut down by mercenaries, and realizes that the deed could have been done only with the connivance of the Church. With him, he takes the girl's alms-offering, a strange pebble, an ovoid whose powers no one knows until Dane succeeds in discovering them. In attempting to keep the stone, Dane must escape the powerful Mercenaries, hired killers who are beyond the law. At last rescued by a young girl, he falls in love with her, only to find that she is more—and less—than she seems. Here is a chase sequence in which the hunted turns on the hunters—

an adventure-packed narrative which gives as much importance to the play of character as it does to the play of events.

ANOTHER KIND. *By Chad Oliver. Ballantine. Cloth: \$2. Paper: 35¢.*

In five of this volume's seven stories Mr. Oliver explores the effect of Man's appearance in space, and his relationship with the alien cultures he meets there. The author's technique: to pose a problem or mystery about the aliens which the anthropologist-ethnologist hero must solve. In "Rite of Passage," the mystery is why some apparently aboriginal extra-terrestrials don't act as savages should; in "Artifact," it's—how can a Martian savage learn to fly a helicopter in ten minutes? And in "Scientific Method," the problem which faces Man is how to make friends with the aliens without endangering the security of the Earth.

Although ingenious, these uniformly underwritten tales are emotionally monotonous. Science fiction is not only a literature of idea; it also demands adventure. Mr. Oliver's stories are too cerebral for more than mild entertainment, and emerge as clever fugues written in a minor key.

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS: 1955. *Edited by T. E. Dikty. Frederick Fell: \$4.50.*

Mr. Dikty, now editing without compatriot Bleiler, has done it again. In this 544-page omnibus he presents a collection of 20 outstanding entertainments by such leading practitioners as Walter M. Miller, Jr. (represented twice); Raymond E. Banks (ditto); William Morrison, Chad Oliver, Winston Marks, Jerome Bixby, Ward Moore, Clifford Simak, Arthur Porges, Frank M. Robinson, et al. You will notice that most of these writers are of the so-called "new group," the younger writers who saw through the gimmick story and now write of people. There are too many good tales to list them all, but I would single out Tom Godwin's "The Cold Equations," Robert Abernathy's "Heirs Apparent," Jerome Bixby's "One-Way Street," and James Causey's "Felony" for taking some old ideas and investing them with new twists and insights. For humor, both japing and ironic, I'd pick "Dominions Beyond," by Ward Moore; "Christmas Trombone," by Raymond E. Banks; and Albert Compton Friborg's "Careless Love."

Although high-priced, here is an anthology without a poor story in the collection—which makes it a bargain.

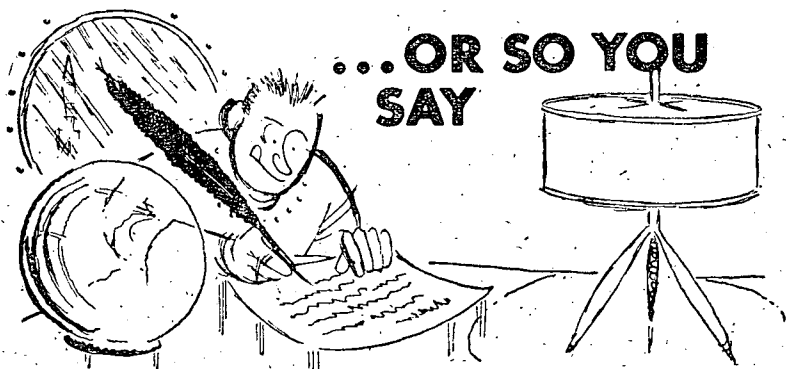
CAVIAR. *By Theodore Sturgeon. Ballantine. Cloth: \$2. Paper: 35¢.*

The rocket engineer uses careful tables of mass, pressure, temperature, and *brennschluss*: his rockets go up and come down as planned. But for the leaping heart, it's often more rewarding, if not as scientific, to watch a Fourth of July rocket go up, explode joyously in a burp of stars, to sprinkle the manswarmed faces with golden specks of light, understanding, horror, fear, and love.

Theodore Sturgeon is a pyrotechnician of the first order. In this, his latest collection of eight short stories, he finds fascination alike in the fizz of a fuse, the thud of a dud, the gasp of stars, and the ricket of a lost rocket stick. Whether immersed and drowning in the sharp poignancy of "Prodigy"; whether wryly ironic and compassionate, as in the powerful "Bright Segment"; whether ingeniously and howlingly funny, as in "Blabbermouth," he lets you taste the unguent and the oil of his words on every papilla of your tongue, while he sets off sparklers for your delight. You'll enjoy this one.

THE OCTOBER COUNTRY. *By Ray Bradbury. Ballantine. \$3.50.*

If Sturgeon (see above) is a pyrotechnician, Ray Bradbury is a miner of major proportions. Cunningly timed and placed small charges crack up smugness: nineteen charges, in all, are devoted to the task of stripping away the topsoil of pretension, to lay bare the deep seams of ore beneath. In such stories as "The Dwarf," "Skeleton," and "Touched With Fire," to name only three of these notable stories, he looks at Man in a new way, presenting us with distorted images whose exaggeration only make us see each other more truly. Like Sturgeon, he is a deft man with a word, but with this difference: gently, softly, he pictures, pillories, and flays hypocrisy. Then, with our disguises in ruin, with our masks gone in smoke, he anoints us with understanding and leaves us, with a wonder and warmth at our own imperfect humanity. Very few, if any, of these stories can be called science fiction, but they are all fantasies, possessed of a macabre power which makes them seem more real than reality. The master has not lost his touch.



BY THE READERS

Dear Mr. Browne:

I read your editorial in the December *Amazing Stories*, and found myself heartily agreeing. I like a good swashbuckling tale, and there are all too few of them in the field at the moment.

Then, however, I read the stories: "Professor Mainbocher's Planet" was, I'll admit, straight out of the old pulp *Amazing*. The daring two-fisted hero, the incredibly beautiful heroine, the evil scientist, and the God-awful writing. It was the worst story in the mag, but I'll grant you your "mighty man of valor." Now, however, we come to "Libel." Come, come, Howard; surely you don't consider the science fiction editors bold, dashing he-men? Or, if you do (and I'll admit you have a right to be somewhat prejudiced), do you think the average reader will agree with you? In the next story, "Ladies in Waiting," we have a hero who spends most of his time getting beaten up by both the villains and his girl-friend, and who has to have his partner rescue him. At the end, he soars off into the sunset with the girl, and the prospect of a long life as a hen-pecked husband. *This* is "the strong love interest between a tremendous man and a fine woman?" Hah! In "Are You Hungry" the central character is a gluttonous expert who solves everything from the dining room—a sort of spacegoing Nero Wolfe, without an interesting assistant to provide action. This probably comes under the heading "unique adventure and stirring deeds." Now we come to "The Poison Pen," which uses the same man-discovers-his-society-is-rotten-to-the-core plot pioneered by your competitor who is

most to blame for the present "goosey quicksand" condition of SF. It is also the best story in the issue despite an ending which was either padded out to fill a blank page or cut in half to leave room for the other departments.

In short, I guess you're "going back to concrete" sort of gradually, huh?

As to the rest of the mag, the book reviews are good but not outstanding, the fanzine reviews are good (meaning they agree with my views on those zines which I've read), the cover not up to the first couple that Valigursky did for you, the interior illos among the best in the field, and the letter column as usual. I am against cutting down the letter column—most of your letters are more interesting and better written than your stories.

Robert Coulson
407½ E. 6th St.
N. Manchester, Ind.

• *Right: we're going back to concrete gradually. Why? We have to. Why? Because we have an inventory, a backlog of manuscripts (good stories all!) which are to be layered in with the type of material we spoke of in the editorial. In fact, our magazines are not going to run "mighty men of valor" copy exclusively; to do so would be as deadening as a steady diet of bon-bons to a diabetic. . . . About your closing remarks: sorry, but the letter section had to be cut back because of majority pressure. As to your last remark: maybe they're better written but the plots are a little weak.*—ED.

Dear H. B.:

I usually don't write letters or cards to the SF editors, but I fervently pray that you receive more than 50,000 cards regarding Eric N. Harlows letter.

You and Ray Palmer are still the best editors. You are not afraid to put your ideas into action.

Louis Meltzer
1660 Amsterdam
New York City

• *Boy, are you going to get jumped on by a few thousand readers!*—ED.

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Dear Mr. Browne:

This will be my first but not last letter to your mag. I plan to send you letters concerning my likes and dislikes.

I have been buying your mag for three years but I can't think of any story I have read in any that was as bad as "The Poison Pen" by Milton Lesser in your December ish. The story was the most senseless. No point at all.

Your cover was good—by itself—the story didn't jibe with it. Examples: 1. Where is his "space suit?" 2. In the story he had no axe. 3. Those NEM (No eyed Monsters) had pinchers. What are they?

As for the rest of the book, I can say that it was pretty good as SF go. I liked "Professor Mainbocher's Planet" by Ivar Jorgensen. It was the best in the book. I liked it so well that I read it several times.

In re Frank Eldrege—that "puerile drip" you refer to I enjoy reading. It sometimes confirms my opinion of some of the stories and pictures.

Also in re to Richard Santelli—you are an old fuddy-duddy who prefers to sit by the fireside and knit. Of course there should be some science in stories but if you want to read a book with plenty of science in it, why don't you pick up a book on Einstein's theories? You won't find much action in it but plenty of science.

And why in hell do you read SF? You know as well as I do, you and I will be rotting in our graves by the time a tenth of it comes anywhere true. Do you want to figure the trajectory of a spaceship then?

Joseph Anderson
283 Malden St.
Rochester, N. Y.

• *To the editor: that's telling you, Mac. To Mr. Santelli: that's telling you, Mac. To Mr. Anderson: write us again, Mac.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

Definitely you are NOT overdoing the letters and departments! I approve. In fact, I heartily approve. So there.

Your November stories were all very readable, save for that . . . that . . . thing by Kendahl. It had some ideas behind

it that could have been worked into an exceptional piece. Shall I mention the characters? They even classify themselves when Jason mentally remarks that the femme should script-write for soap-operas. After pages it loses its charm and begins to get in the way of the plot.

As an idle by-the-bye observation: P. A. Clark, at twenty-two years, has a cat, a trailer, and *three kids*? Hoooo. . . .

Jan Sadler

219 Broadmoor Dr.

Jackson 6, Miss.

• *You say we aren't; others say we are. More say "are" than "not." So, we are; so we cut; so there. . . . Whadda-yuh mean: "Hoooo?"—Mr. Clark happens to read science fiction.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

Having been a reader of science-fiction for the last ten years, I feel qualified, (as what fan doesn't?), to add my words to the many you receive every month.

1st; I like and read your magazine (a little item I thought to cheer you up).

2nd; PLEASE, PLEASE, NO, repeat NO, long or three or four part serials. Have pity.

I have a drawer full of magazines that are running serials: by the time I have all the parts (so I may read the stories as a whole) I'll be grey-haired, and not from age.

As an alternate (haven't I nerve: to tell you how to run your mag?) why not run an issue with just one long novel—no shorts—some of the other editors in your field have done this. But since the suggestion comes from one of your many, many readers, you can't be accused of copying.

TO MR. SANTELLI:

1. What's wrong with comics? I like Donald Duck.

2. Who ever heard of a world without people? That's what makes me and others like me human—we like people. That's what makes Heinlein's work (among many authors) so successful, he writes of people. Would you say he, or Bradbury or Sturgeon belong in a comic book? You should look before you leap, Mr. Santelli; have you read "Waldo," a great piece of work, about a person, yet very good SF. And there are

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lots more of the same, if you look: But obviously you haven't.

3. Who wants to "grow-up" become "adult" if that means losing the quality of tolerance (as you have). Not I, and I suspect Mr. Santelli that you are not so "adult." If you wish my reason for that statement read G. B. Shaw's "Major Barbara." The scene where Undershaft is speaking to his wife about their son. You might learn something. But I forget, only the young learn: the young in heart, that is.

If anyone wants to continue the above discussion, or any other, I always answer my mail.

Thank you, Mr. Browne, for reading these few words: which seem to have grown a few thousand.

Evelyn M. Catoe
323 Powers St.
New Brunswick, N. J.

• Well, let's see: 1). Thank you.. 2). Gotta have serials. Why? The readers—and the editor, if you don't mind—like stories rich in detail, plot, colorful backgrounds, solid characterization. Hard to get all that into a short length; in fact it's darn near impossible. Suggestion: read the complete stories each issue but hold back on the serial until you have all four (or whatever) parts; then take a long snowy evening to yourself and read right straight through. No charge. . . . About Mr. Santelli: he paid his money and he said his say and we printed it. He got a reaction. If he wants to write his reaction to the reaction, our columns are open to him.—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

I would like to address the first part of this letter to Mr. Richard Santelli.

Phonies, huh? Boy! I personally started on SF about four years ago for these reasons: 1. I am an avid reader, and on occasion have whacked off 8 books in a week.—It got so I was ahead of the plot with a couple thousand words between where my eyes were and where my mind was. Very disturbing.

In SF, the only thing I know is that I haven't the foggiest idea about what will happen next.

2. I am only a poor woman with art training and an IQ of somewhere around 142 and I have to ponder on scientific explanations for a while before they become clear (if they're

complex, that is). Contemplation is all very well and good, but I'm a gal of action—which is what I get in AS.

3. I'm a bit of an amateur psychologist and philosopher, and SF feeds that beast too. OK?

4. Now—I too am pleased with the Mayhem series—very refreshing.

The December issue is right up there—glad to hear you're going monthly.

I particularly liked "Professor Mainbocher's Planet" and "Ladies in Waiting."

Also enjoyed the Observatory—I cut my teeth on Burroughs—both Tarzan and John Carter. Also Pellucidar and more recently the Venus stories. Upon reading in your editorial the words "wealth of descriptive detail" I was jarred into pulling down my copy of "The God of Mars" to hunt up the passage dealing with the invasion of the Temple of the Thers by the black pirates of Barsoom. To quote, "Here a little knot of warriors trampled a bed of gorgeous pimailia; there the curved sword of a black man found the heart of a thern and left its dead foeman at the foot of a wondrous statue carved from a living ruby; yonder a dozen therns pressed a single pirate back upon a bench of emerald, upon whose iridescent surface a strangely beautiful Barsoomian design is traced out in inlaid diamonds."

To my mind, this type of description does not in the least hamper the "pace" (and what a little tin God that is), but instead sets the stage in a most striking manner, so that the battle is waged against a real and vivid background.

By the way, while I'm at it I'd like to put in a good word for "These Bones for Hire," one of the best in many a day.

This is my first letter to an SF magazine—forgive me for being long-winded, but 4 years worth of opinions are screaming to be heard, so I'd better clap the lid on right now!

Oh yes, before I forget.—You can put me on the list for your annual, although I'll probably be changing addresses within the next six months or so. I'll keep you posted.

Barbie Brown Johnson
12511 Clifton Blvd.
Cleveland, Ohio

• *We spent three months, read lord knows how many thous-*

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ands of words, talked with a dozen writers—trying to get the kind of material your letter quotes. Result: zero. Fortunately Forrie Ackerman sent us the Manly Banister novel; and while, with all due respect to Mr. B., it wasn't exactly what we had in mind, it came closest to hitting the mark. Meanwhile, we've got a couple of promising prospects for the mantle of ERB, and the next novel should be of classic stature.... Yours was a mighty nice letter, Mrs. Johnson.—ED.

Dear Editor:

I would like to tell you how much I enjoyed the Dec. 1955 issue of *Amazing Stories*.

Glad to hear it was boosted to a monthly. How much is the giant 260 page *Amazing Stories*? I wish you would have more short stories, 15 or 20 pages.

How I rate the stories in the Dec. issue:

1. "Ladies in Waiting"
2. "Professor Mainbocher's Planet"
3. "The Poison Pen"
4. "Libel"
5. "Are You Hungry?"

Jack Sarp
Cleveland, Ohio

• *The majority of lists placed "Professor Mainbocher's Planet" first, "Libel" second, "Ladies in Waiting" third, "Are You Hungry" fourth, "Poison Pen" fifth. . . . The BIG April issue will sell for half a buck—the biggest bargain since the sixty-cent four-course meal. We have received over nine-hundred mail orders already—although none were solicited. Your best bet is to reserve a copy at your newsdealers; you'll get it far quicker that way. And besides, newsdealers have to make a living too.—ED.*

Dear Editor.:

Re the letter by James Lewis in the September '55 issue. Mr. Lewis' letter pretty well describes an SF fan, but not the *average* one. The *average* fan reads science-fiction, and buys SF magazines. The "maniac" fan "lives, breathes, talks" SF. I know; I'm one. Of course, I don't publish a fanzine (no dough), but I collect SF books, "slicks," mags, and science

articles pertaining to space flight, et cetera. I believe I am a little more avid than an *average* fan, (I know a few), and several times I have been called a maniac, (in relation to SF, of course).

To change the subject, I *like* the New *Amazing*. That is, I've never known the old *Amazing* to compare it against the new. I may have seen it on the newsstands, but it wasn't until last year that I began reading the SF magazines. Up until that time, I swore I would never collect any SF but the "slicks." The first mag I read was *Galaxy*. Astounding followed, then a few others. But it wasn't until the November issue of *Amazing* that I read your mag. Since then, it has become one of my favorites; the others mentioned above being the favorites. I still don't care for the pulps; it was the pulps that made me take a negative view of all SF mags.

I like the Reader's Views section best, next to the stories; in fact, I read the letters first. The stories in *Amazing* are tops, too, even if slightly below that of two other SF mags. (You don't have to print that; you probably won't, anyway.)

To all SF fans, everywhere: now is the time for all good SF fans to come to the aid of SF. With the announcement by the Fed. Gov. of the new satellite to be launched in 1958, it's our turn to laugh back at those who have ridiculed us and called us crazy, et cetera.

Arlan K. Andrews
Route 1, Box 219
Little Rock, Arkansas

• *Sorry we took so long to use your letter, Arlan. It was nice to read and we hope you'll write to us again.*—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

First of all you can thank Roger De Soto for the very nice review of PSI in the December issue of *Amazing*.

I appreciate your change of policy toward rough and ready heroes, someone who the reader can imagine he is, and does not, as you so aptly put it, Suffer from dandruff, shingles, three neuroses and an Oedipus complex. . . ." But the complete change of Johnny in PM's Planet was so radical I became confused during the course of the story and the rest of it became so much trash and half-truth.

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The rest of the stories were so-so, the best being "Ladies in Waiting." I guess because of the unusual plot construction contained therein, something that most SF writers overlook.

The policy of alternating "The Revolving Fan" with the "Spectroscope" because of the readers yelling for more space for stories is so much bosh. The 18 pages that you devoted to the readers was in just about the correct proportion.

Lyle Amlin
307 E. Florida
Hemet, Calif.

• *We try to publish readers' letters verbatim, but the word you used where we inserted "bosh"—uh-uh, Lyle. Naughty!*
—ED.

Dear Editor:

I like it! I like it! I like it! *Amazing! Amazing! Amazing!* Just as it is! Just as it is! Just as it is! Don't change it! Don't change it! Don't change it!

William Sharon
Route #2
Kent New York

• *Thanks! Thanks! Thanks! To all three of you.*—ED.

Dear Editor:

The new issue of *Amazing* was right up to the high standard you've set since you threw out all those phoney "sophisticated stories last year." I'm an old-time fan of your mags, from back when they printed the wonderful book-lengthers every issue, and I think you're succeeding in recapturing the spirit of those days.

In the December issue, I liked first of all the cover, one of Valigursky's best. "Professor Mainbocher's Planet" was just the kind of lead novel I like, and the shorts were up to par. I hope we'll be seeing more of new names like Darius John Granger and Howard Rush in the future.

Floyd E. Birnbaum
400 College Street
Fond du Lac, Wis.

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Please have free literature on the Hi-Fi world of sound
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(Please print)

Name.....
Street.....
City..... State.....

a man likes to fish on vacations. Only I was told they don't have water on the mo—"

"Nonsense, Mr. Gooch! Wherever there's fish you'll find water. Isn't that true?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I guess that's a fact. . . . Now about the neighbors. Martha and me'd like to make sure they'd be, you know, desirable. For instance we wouldn't want to live next door to no—"

"Dismiss the thought, Mr. Gooch, dismiss the thought. We intend to sell only to people of the same intelligence and vision as yourself. *That* we can guarantee."

"Fine, fine! I'm certainly relieved to hear you, uh—I was also kinda wondering about how healthy the climate is. Now like here in town. All them fumes and chemicals in the air, a person can get all kinds of lung trouble and—"

"No worries there, Mr. Gooch! Up there on the moon—or Luna, as we like to call it—you'll find only the rarest type of atmosphere. Why, sir, we guarantee you won't be able to smell a thing!"

"Certainly sounds good. . . . Now there's the matter of transportation. I hafta be at the office on time every day, the boss being a real stickler for being on time, and—"

"Glad you brought that up, sir! You can be absolutely sure that it won't take you a minute longer to get to work than it does for you to get home. That's another of our guarantees."

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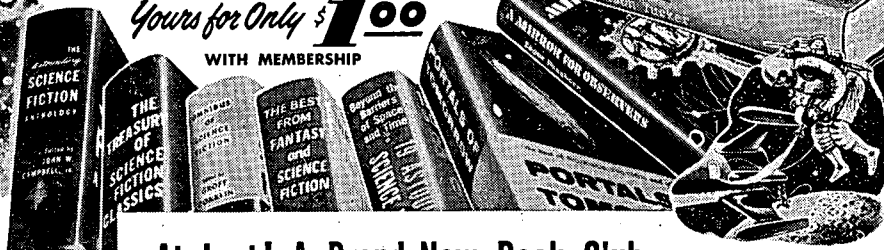
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